Mancur, John Henry

HENRI QUATRE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.

Geo. Payne Rainsford James.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR WHITTAKER & Co.
AVE MARIA LANE.

1834.

LONDON:
GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

HENRI QUATRE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.

CHAPTER XXV.

Ce fort chateau d'Auvergne fut un Tabor pour sa devotion, un Liban pour sa solitude, un Olympe pour ses exercices, un Parnasse pour ses Muses, et un Caucase pour ses afflictions.

HILARION DE COSTE.

THE stirring events which terminated in the flight of Valois, the surrender of the Louvre, and the royal dependencies of the capital, created an intense interest, not merely over France, but throughout Christendom. The Prince of Parma, commander of the Spanish forces in the Low Countries, and the first general of the age, declared that the Duke of Guise had either gone too far, or stopped short of a wise policy; he should either have taken no violent steps against his Liege's

authority, or in passing the boundaries of allegiance, should not have entrusted the enterprise of securing the person of the King to an army of undisciplined burgesses and monks. In France, the Protector was either praised or condemned, according to the politics and religion of the party who sat in judgment on his conduct; receiving a different award, as the judge happened to be Huguenot, Leaguer, or Royal partisan.

However inwardly chagrined at his thwarted policy, Guise repressed all outward demonstrations of ill feeling; and in an interview with Catherine at her hotel, whither she had retired, he said, very speciously, "I am not in rebellion against my honoured Liege—but I cannot answer for the feelings and behaviour of the Council of Sixteen, who rule me, as well as every other gentleman in the city."

Whilst Valois, who arrived safely at Chartres, was gradually assembling his friends and scattered troops, and regaining, though slowly, the retinue and pomp of Majesty, the governors of provinces and of the military posts of the kingdom, were speculating on the extent and liability of their allegiance.

When a vessel falls to pieces, each man clings to the nearest spar; when the executive power of

a state is dissolved, and its laws threatened with extinction or abeyance, every one in office asks himself the question—To whom is fealty due?

The searching policy of Catherine—the fiery threats of Montpensier—the malignant hatred of the ecclesiastics towards the dynasty of Valois—and the cautious yet persevering career of the Protector—were, to their several originators, less harassing than the perplexity of those who held governments of the crown. The subtlest reasoners of this class argued thus:—The power of the King is crumbled into dust; and though the shadow of authority still lingers with his person, yet that will be dissipated when Guise leaves Paris, and takes the field against him. But are we therefore to hold our commissions of the Protector of the League?—Assuredly not! Our lineage is as pure as his own, though, indeed, he boasts of a royal descent! Therefore we hold not of him—but of whom, then?

This second question generally reduced the self-interrogator to the painful necessity of denying allegiance both to Guise and Valois, and to the consequent resolution of doing homage only to himself, with a firm determination of making every one, within the limits of his rule, perform the same ceremony. But the matter did not rest here. He

who found himself lord and master of a province, might be excused for an occasional dream of a diadem encircling his brows, and passing as a heir-loom to his descendants! To continue our former metaphor,—he who was strong enough, seized a plank of the wreck, and left his brethren to sink or swim.

But among those in whom honour exercised a greater sway, and who gave allegiance where only it was due, ranked the Marquis de Cœuvres, an old gentleman, in whom simplicity of manners was joined to an inflexible rectitude of conduct. He was governor of the royal fortress of D'Usson, which had formerly been a state prison, and used for that purpose by the eleventh Louis, when the citadel of Loches was unable to accommodate the whole of its numerous guests.

D'Usson consisted of a castle with its dependencies, situated on the summit of a basaltic rock, in the province of Auvergne; its base nearly encircled by a rapid stream, which threw itself into the river Allier, at the distance of a league from the rock. Nature had done her utmost to render the station impregnable; on every side it was protected by shelving precipices, with but one narrow path to the fortress; a winding causeway, overlooked and commanded by the battlements of the

gate-tower. The table-land on the summit, admirably adapted for the purpose, was entirely surrounded by the walls of the fortress, in such wise that their foundations seemed to grow out of the rock as though it were their natural parent. To the spectators below, no footing for assault was visible, even if soldiers were found hardy enough to attempt to scale the precipitous sides of the eminence.

Such was the aspect of D'Usson to its foes; presenting nothing but obstacles to the rash leader who should venture to beleaguer its lofty towers; but to those who found security and a place of refuge within its walls, the panoramic scene which it afforded, was a source of pleasure and interest rarely surpassed. From the terrace on the roof of the principal tower, was seen, towards the east, the opening of the romantic *St. Jean en Val*, with its winding stream and slopes of verdure; on the south, the course of the noble and rapid Allier, which the eye followed till it was lost amid the mountains. From the base of the rock to the banks of the river, the valley named St. Germain *sous* D'Usson, spread a rich banquet to the eye of the enraptured beholder, who, not contented with tracing the glistening mountain torrent to its junction with the Allier, looked westward across

the latter stream, where, in the distance, stood the strong town of Issoire, backed by heights, clothed to their summits with forests and heather.

Here, amid the beauties of a province which united the majestic solemnity of naked rocks and pinnacled crags with the loveliest and most pastoral retreats, resided the old Marquis, perched aloof, far above the contention and din of arms, which ever and anon disturbed the repose of the valleys. The garrison was far from numerous, but quite sufficient to defend a post which nature herself had fashioned into a strong-hold for her children; and as the instructions of the governor were to keep himself quiet, and restrain his valour to the mere defence of the fortress, he was enabled to indulge himself in repose and luxury, while all beneath breathed of strife and rebellion.

De Cœuvres was in truth a simple-minded man, without ambition or ability, and had been selected by the Queen-mother, through her opinion of his honesty. When the flattering mandate reached him at the Chateau de Cœuvres, he was a widower, and spent the greater portion of his time in tending the education of his daughter Gabrielle.

At D'Usson, the scanty routine of official duties allowed him to continue the same gratifying task, and with such success, that Gabrielle promised

to be a prodigy of learning;—that is to say, she read Marot, Pibrac, and Pasquier, and the poems also of the sprightly court poet, Ronsard; all, save the first-named poet, contemporary writers, whose effusions, in thick quarto and folio volumes, arrived in succession from the Parisian seat of the Muses. Her knowledge of the classics was indeed confined to a translation of Ovid and several of the minor Latin poets, whose verses had been deemed worthy of imitation by the French wits of the sixteenth century; but to make amends, she had studied deeply the carols and songs of the troubadours, and was a rare proficient in the *lange d'oc.* She was also acquainted with the writings and *gesta* of the chroniclers, not merely of the chivalric era, but of the darker ages which preceded the crusades, when learned archbishops, and good-tempered indolent monks, sat in their "sunny oriels," and concocted tales and histories, in which the costume, and mode of thinking, and faith of the descendants of Charlemagne and his heroes, were engrafted upon classic incidents, and scenes laid in the cities of Greece and Rome.

But the effusions of the troubadours, so harmonious in their cadences, and seemingly the offspring of the moment, as joy or grief possessed the soul of

the poet, and he strung his harp to soothe a weary hour, or give vent to his rapture—were her favourites. As she paced the terrace of the fortress, and looked towards the south—the land of the unforgotten minstrels whom she honoured, often would she exclaim with delight in the words of the enthusiastic, Vidal:—

I eagerly inhale the breeze
From thee, sweet Provence, blowing;
And all that's thine delights me so,
Such pleasant thoughts bestowing,
That if thy very name is named
I listen joyously,
And ask a hundred words for one—
So sweet to hear of thee.
And surely none can name a spot
So sweet in memory biding,
As 'twixt the Durance and the sea
Where the swift Rhone is gliding [1].

Gabrielle D'Estrées, was indeed worthy of a poet to sing the praises of her charms. She had never been at the court of Paris, and there was an air, certainly not of rusticity, as her life was passed in the society of equals, but of a graceful yet reserved deportment, which could not have withstood the gay intercourse of the Louvre. Her stature was above the ordinary height of her sex,

[1] From the translation by the author of the Lays of the Minnesingers.

though within the limits of elegance and womanly proportion; and her captivating provincial aspect and healthful glow of complexion would have afforded a model for our own Spenser in his Belphœbe. If Arnaud De Marveil could have risen from his tomb, he would have beheld another beauty, worthier of his praise, than her whom he called—

> Fairer than the far-famed Helen,
> Lovelier than the flowrets gay;
> Snow-white teeth, and lips truth-telling,
> Heart as open as the day,
> Golden hair, and fresh bright roses:—

But we must forbear—the language of the troubadours is not for the present age. Gabrielle, in sober truth, was worth the storming of a castle, or even of listening to the stories of her father, as he sat in an antique chair, and repeated his adventures at the court of the gallant Francis.

At the period to which our history has now arrived, his fair daughter had long ceased to benefit by his varied lore; and in return for the instruction which she had received from his parental care, was accustomed to amuse him, when tired of the recital of his reminiscences, with passages from her favourite poets and romancers.

The Marquis was getting old and garrulous,

and enjoyed the comforts of his sinecure post in an age which was stirring men's blood into the activity and rancour of party strife and warfare. Hitherto the periodical wars with the Huguenots had been treated as a matter of course, and did not even interfere, during the intervals of peace, with marriage alliances between the partisans of the rival sects; but when Valois was driven from his palace by the ambitious Protector of the League, every Frenchman saw the necessity of buckling on his armour for the cause he espoused.

De Cœuvres was, however, unmoved, save in his indignation against the disloyal priesthood and citizens, whom he stigmatized in terms becoming the loyalty of a faithful servant of his liege. But the even tenor of his life was not disturbed either by the threatened hostilities between Valois and Guise, or by the excursions of Navarre, who since the breaking up of the winter had penetrated into Auvergne with his cavalry. More than once had the gallant leader of the Huguenots made pretence of beleaguering D'Usson, but the old Marquis only laughed at these hostile dispositions; and as he performed his daily inspection of the battlements, would derisively point out to the slender garrison, with his cane, the encampment of the heretics.

In these military perambulations, he was accompanied by one who performed the duties of steward seneschal of the castle, and chamberlain. Monsieur Pomini, as he designated himself, was the son of an artisan of Avignon, who had acquired sufficient wealth to leave his son in a better condition than that in which his own humble career had commenced. Pomini, who was clever and industrious, rapidly acquired whatever knowledge and learning fell within his reach; and being of an ambitious turn of mind, he resolved that his own career should commence, where that of his father had terminated. Yet though commerce was open to him, and he had the example before his eyes, of merchants who vied with the noblesse in the splendour of their houses and the profusion of their viands, he despised the attainment of so vulgar a station, and determined to force his way within the pale of gentility, or die in the struggle. He observed closely the various and conflicting conditions of life, and more especially its outward forms and observances;—from the rude charcoal-burner to the monarch on the throne, his acute mind had sedulously traced the occupations and privileges of every intervening title and grade of society.

"If I become a merchant," said the young man,

"I may never fairly rank as a gentleman, though I could purchase half a province. It would be a blot on my escutcheon—that must not be—other modes shall be tried!"

His money was speedily changed for land, and he became the owner of six farms. His next measure was to leave Avignon; it was a disagreeable place in his eyes—so much so—that he would gladly have seen the plough-share furrowing the earth, where palace and hovel were together congregated, and cemented by the labour of centuries. He was now in possession of the territory, and only wanted the letters-patent of gentility, which he flattered himself would some day fall to his lot, without having ever stained himself with mercantile or artistical occupation.

The third step was to attach himself in some way or other to the fortunes of a powerful noble, in whose service or suite, he could wait hard by the boundaries of his object, till an opportunity presented itself of overleaping the enclosure. To accomplish this last and master-point of policy, he trusted to his assiduity and keenness of vision—and trusted intuitively, for he was not conscious of the extent of his own talents, nor even of their direct scope. But nature had indicated her aim by desire; which fortunately for Pomini, was

suffered to expand in a congenial atmosphere, and bore him onward triumphantly.

About the time of his leaving Avignon, chance threw him in the way of the Marquis, who in addition to the family domain and marquisate of Cœuvres, possessed lands near Avignon, whither he had repaired to gather in his harvest. They were mutually struck with each other; the incipient gentleman with the *governor* of D'Usson—and the Marquis with the *bonhommie*, harmless vanity, and lively discourse of Pomini. A treaty commenced and was concluded, and the contemner of the merchants of Marseilles and Avignon took office under De Cœuvres, who, on his part, thought his recruit a better harvest than the produce of the corn-fields by the Rhone.

Nor was the old governor mistaken in his man. The seneschal enlivened the gloom of the fortress during the long winter evenings with his never-ceasing conversation and bustle; and the new officer was pleased that he had now the model of a gentleman ever present, and which he might study at leisure;—the only drawback was its age, as he feared he might adopt, by untimely imitation, forms of speech, and other matters of personal demeanour, belonging not to gentility in the abstract, but to old age. But from this fear he was released by

the periodical arrival of the neighbouring noblesse, who came to pay their respects and visits to the Marquis, and which gave the seneschal the wished for opportunity of mixing with the class to which his ambition aspired.

That it is necessary to stoop to conquer, was not so much the policy as the faith of Pomini, who had a wise humility of heart, which made even pride subservient to prudence; and the aspirant to nobility was in consequence the very best and most diligent of servants. In a short time his presence was as requisite to the comforts of the governor as his daily food; the seneschal, chamberlain, and steward, became adviser, confidant, and friend. Pomini, who remarked the happy effects of his servility, thought that his object was near the period of accomplishment, and intended on the first favourable opportunity, to obtain from Valois, through the interest of the governor, the title and territorial privileges of a gentleman.

"Yes!" exclaimed the chamberlain, starting from a reverie;—"it would sound exceedingly well! Monsieur L'Isle du Marais! If there be a much longer delay, I will make old De Cœuvres go to Paris on purpose. The foundation of a house which may exist for centuries—the Pominies of L'Isle du Marais!—is surely an affair of import-

ance—at least my great-grandsons will think so! Besides, there was a L'Isle du Marais a century ago, though not a trace of the chateau exists, and the lordship itself is extinguished; or, indeed, I would have taken the name by right of purchase. Well! may not the Languedoc herald, a hundred years hence, connect my pedigree with the old family?"

But the bright visions of the seneschal were about to be disturbed for awhile by the untoward fortunes of Valois. When the news reached D'Usson that the king had been forced to fly for his life from the Louvre, the indignation of De Cœuvres did not exceed the grief of Pomini. If Guise became monarch, it were doubtful whether the great-grandson of the seneschal would be in a condition to bribe the Languedoc herald.

This consideration so overwhelmed him, that he ardently wished he had never seen the Marquis, but had attached himself to the League in preference.

"It will never do for me to be lingering here," said the disconsolate Pomini; "I must be on that side which has the ascendancy—I must have a patron who possesses the ear of royalty—if his present Majesty should be deposed or slain before I get my patent—of what avail have been the

years passed at D'Usson, humouring a silly old man, and listening to stories which our fair Mademoiselle Gabrielle is glad to escape from? Sacre! By the house of L'Isle Du Marais! I will become a Leaguer if the Protector triumph! Is an honourable house to have no existence because of these silly passing affairs? By our lady of Good-luck! I stand in a predicament—if affairs go on at this rate, I will not order another sheep to be killed at D'Usson—I will starve or poison them all, except Mademoiselle, and deliver up the castle to him who has Montjoie at his elbow—be he Valois, Lorraine, or the devil!"

He was in truth quite disordered with the news; instead of his usual smirking address, he stared the old Marquis out of countenance, as he waited to receive his evening's instructions respecting the night-watch, and other matters connected with the economy of the fortress; and snapped his fingers audibly, out of pure vexation, while Gabrielle was reciting an old legend.

"What ails you, Pomini," said the governor, who was almost buried in his large chair; "that you cannot wait till I have heard out this brave old *gesta*? Gabrielle has disappointed me three successive nights, and I shall never hear the end of it!"

"Well! Monseigneur," cried his daughter, shutting up the book; you must now attend more closely to your official duties—who knows but Pomini has a tale to tell of an enemy marching up the causeway? I shall leave you to yourselves."

"But—Gabrielle!" almost shouted the governor, as he saw her preparing to leave the chamber, "when shall I learn the fate of the brave Armorican knight—tell me, did he rescue the lady?"

"Ah! Monseigneur!" cried Gabrielle, turning to her father, with a smile intended as a recompense for her running away; "that mode of telling a story will never do. You shall hear all as it is written."

But, seeing that her smile had not vanquished his displeasure, she approached the chair in which he was seated—stepping across the room with such a winning air of persuasion, that the seneschal could have fallen on his knees and worshipped her in place of his favourite *Notre Dame de Bonne Aventure*—or Goodluck, as we have before rendered it. The Marquis held out his hand, which Gabrielle took; and, after pressing it to her lips, said, playfully,—

"Now cannot you, brave chevalier, fancy yourself, for one evening, the hero in a real romance—that D'Usson is an enchanted castle—I, a sor-

ceress, holding you, a prince, in captivity—and Pomini, your esquire? Cannot you fancy such a change?"

"Most truly," replied the Marquis, yielding to her humour.

"Then," rejoined Gabrielle, smiling, "you would wish the sorceress out of your presence, that you might hold counsel with your faithful esquire on the best chance of escape."

And so saying, and without waiting for a reply, the lady retired to her own chamber overlooking the valley of St. Germain.

"It is very strange!" said De Cœuvres; "a malady has broken out at D'Usson! Gabrielle was till lately fond of reading to me—aye, till midnight, if I had suffered her—but now she runs away to her chamber every evening thus early. And you, Pomini, have caught the disease in a most virulent manner. It has stiffened your back, starched the muscles of your face, and turned your eyes into stone——"

"What! Do you not think I walk like a gentleman?" asked Pomini, ever anxious on the score of his personal attainments.

"You are the prince of chamberlains!" replied the Marquis, smiling;—"if King Francis, of happy memory, were alive, he would not wish a goodlier

pair of legs to walk before him to the chamber which bears his name."

"I wish his grandson would visit us," said the seneschal.

"My poor master!" said De Cœuvres,—"I hope he will never be reduced to the necessity of flying here for refuge. It would be a sad day for the house of Valois."

"Our's is an uncertain life, Monseigneur," said Pomini,—"the world is ever changing its rulers. One dynasty succeeds another. There is no longer any living of the ancient family of L'Isle Du Marais, but——"

"What has your cursed marshes to do with the destinies of France?" exclaimed the Marquis, between anger and mirth.

"Now that the seignorial rights have passed away, not much," replied Pomini, gravely.

"If I were a young man and a soldier," said De Cœuvres, who was, however, conscious of his own love of ease;—"I should pine away in this lofty retreat, if gallant deeds were doing on the plains of France. I never fought but once, and that once against the Huguenots at the battle of Jarnac. We beat them gloriously. I will describe the movements of the heretics.—Their cavalry were stationed at——"

But now that considerable doubt existed of the power of Valois to assist his old servant, the Marquis, Pomini was determined not to bear the repetition of the battle of Jarnac. He ventured rather rudely to interrupt the governor, by asking him if he had heard of the new demonstration which the heretics had made that day.

"What of them?" exclaimed the Marquis, hastily; "did the girl then speak truth? Why not tell me before?"

Pomini would not have been much puzzled to explain satisfactorily the reason of his silence respecting an event of which he had never heard; but rather than hear the movement of the columns at Jarnac, he narrated a movement of his own invention, which implied that Navarre had marched from *St. Jean en Val* to *St. Germain sous D'Usson;* but the seneschal, on a sudden, recollecting that his fabrication would be discovered in the morning, added to it, by saying, that the Huguenots marched back again.

Old De Cœuvres burst out into a loud fit of laughter to the great dismay of his subaltern, who, however, recovered from his alarm, on the governor saying:—

"They might as well attempt to pluck a star from heaven as to scale this eyrie. Poor Navarre

has not a single piece of cannon! What folly has induced him to waste his time in loitering in the valleys? One would suppose, he thinks himself a basilisk, or a snake, which fascinates its prey. But I'll tell you how the case stands, Pomini.—You can sit down there!"

The poor seneschal obeyed, though screwing his toes within his shoes through vexation.

"The King of Navarre," continued the Marquis, "is a mere creature of impulse. He is brave and daring, but persevering only for a season: he would have lived and died in the Louvre had not he been roused by shame and the entreaties of his friends. The affair at Coutras was very clever, but such a victory will not happen again, unless De Rosny, and De Grammont, and De Vivans, keep close at his elbow. At Paris he was always engaged in some affair of the heart, and I dare say that is his present predicament, and his friends will discover that the spring campaign in Auvergne has for its object a dalliance with a pretty peasant girl, or, perhaps, the wife of a burgess, or noble, of Issoire, though, indeed, he is on the wrong side of the river for that town. Heed not the movements of Navarre unless our friends below bring word of the arrival of De Nevailles or De Rosny at his camp;—the heretic must be wound up before he can be

set a going, though I allow his movements are then very rapid."

"Should we not lay our account in expecting the Protector's troops to come in search of the heretics?" inquired the seneschal, who was sensitively alive to the movements of the former party.

"And what if they do?" cried De Cœuvres, "if Guise and all his forces were beneath in the valley, I would not alter my conduct in any one particular. Nay—I wish they were, for then Gabrielle would, perhaps, stay here and read, instead of running to the solitude of her own chamber. But Guise is still in Paris, and Valois between him and Auvergne.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Sans rien blasmer, je sers une maitresse,
Qui toute femme ayant noble hautesse
Passe en vertus, et qui porte le nom
D'une fleur belle: et en royal surnom
Demonstre bien son antique noblesse.

LOUANGE À MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

NOT many days after the conversation narrated in the last chapter, the Marquis was walking on the terrace of the castle accompanied by Gabrielle. On the battlements beneath were stationed Jean La Roche, an old soldier who had served in every campaign against the Huguenots, and his comrade, a young recruit, whom the governor had induced to leave the valley for the aerial fortress and military duties of the garrison.

"By St. Genevieve! but you'll make a rare sentinel!" exclaimed Jean, addressing his companion.

"And tell me why?" asked the recruit.

"You look two ways at the same time," replied

the veteran;—"one eye upon your own valley, and the other at the terrace—but have a care!—and never trouble yourself with things above you!"

The young man blushed through his sun-burnt complexion.

"Robert," said La Roche, who perceived the confusion of the peasant-soldier, "that old gentleman who is now peeping down upon us, is an excellent master for one fond of ease; but you ought to see more of the world than you can meet with in this eagle's nest. Old as I am, I should like to have a dash at the heretics, if there were more of us;—but this is a bad school for a recruit, by St. Louis! I wish that King of Navarre would try the steep road, just for once, that I might draw my cartridge in a natural way—but he is a sluggard."

"I thought they were scaling the rock the other night," said Robert; "it was the night-watch, and I was standing on the opposite angle, when I heard a strange noise like men creeping up the sides—but all was quiet after awhile, though I stretched my hearing to catch the sound."

"And did you not tell the Marquis, or the pompous seneschal?" inquired the old soldier.

"What to be laughed at," replied Robert, "as you did at me just now, because I looked at the

governor's tall daughter? No; I know better than that, by our lady of St. Germain! I was born within sight of D'Usson, and I never heard of any road but the one cut on purpose for the troops—and the noise I heard was in the wrong quarter. It must have been the wind whistling in the crannies, or an old witch—our lady preserve us!—riding through the air."

"Ah," cried the veteran drily, "I am a heretic on the score of witches, except those like the bright lady Gabrielle, who turns all our heads. She is the witch of D'Usson! brother Robert; but I have seen too many of her sex to be out of my senses for more than a second—just a glance of the eye, as though a strong light flashed across it, and that's all. There was the Queen of Navarre, a braver lady than our governor's daughter. I have seen her at Fontainebleau, and at the Louvre, when that testy old fellow, Marshal De Biron, commanded our regiment of arquebusiers. I was on guard at Notre Dame when she was married in front of the church, to the King of Navarre, whom, by the by, I have not seen, Robert, since the day before yesterday in the morning."

"You have seen kings and queens and princes, from all parts of the world," said Robert, resting his arquebuse against the battlements, "but tell

me, is not our lady Gabrielle very like a queen when she walks by us on the parade, and returns our salute so graciously?"

"May be she is," replied Jean La Roche, whose memory was busy with his own tale, "but I was saying, I saw the Queen of Navarre married. How proudly she looked. Ah! by St. Genevieve! that was my picture of what a queen should be. The young prince attempted to smile and be gallant, but she frowned him into humility."

"What, was he ugly?" cried Robert.

"No, not that," replied the veteran smiling at the ignorance of his comrade, "but the marriage was forced upon her by that smooth-tongued, stealthy cat her mother. She hated Navarre as she would have hated any other pretender to her hand, except, perhaps, as it was whispered, a secret favourite.—But let that pass. You should have seen the Princess when the archbishop asked her if she took the King for a husband—she never spoke, but looked like a woman crazed, or dreaming of something else."

"And were they so cruel as to marry the poor lady?" asked Robert, who always listened with interest to the stories of his talkative comrade.

"Marry her!" cried Jean, "why her brother Charles and his mother would have married her to

one of the towers of Notre Dame, if they had fancied it. But she had courage not to answer the archbishop, so the old Cardinal De Bourbon, who happened to stand behind the Princess, pushed forward her head with his rude hand—and the nod was reckoned as good as a word by her mother."

"Ah, that would not have done for me," cried the peasant, tossing his head, "my wife should have spoken, or I would have left the church and gone home, and——"

But the speaker was interrupted by the Marquis, who shouted, "La Roche, you idler! are they friends or foes in the south? and send Robert to alarm the warden."

"Umph," growled the veteran, "while talking to you about Notre Dame, the old gentleman has caught me at fault."

La Roche, who aspired, as became a soldier who had served under De Biron, to the distinction of a strict disciplinarian, was angry that the governor, whom he accounted as a nobody in respect of military skill, should discover the approach of strangers ere he himself was aware of it. His practised eye, in looking in the direction pointed out, by the Marquis, perceived a cavalcade alternately within sight, and disappearing for awhile

behind the rocks and foliage which obscured the southern valley.

Navarre, it was reported, had removed his quarters to a more distant part of the province, and left the valleys *sous* D'Usson free to the intercourse which ordinarily subsisted between the inhabitants of the fortress and their more lowly neighbours. It was not, therefore, without apprehension of being again blockaded, and obliged to resort to the garrison stores, that the dwellers of the mount viewed the approach of a new enemy.

But all doubt of the further continuance of their daily supply of fresh provisions was set at rest when the number and condition of the strangers were ascertained. The imaginary army dwindled into a humble escort engaged in the safe conduct of a litter and its fair burthen, who was obviously bound for the lofty castle which rose before their path.

"And who does us the honour of a visit in these perilous times?" exclaimed the Marquis, as he bent his eyes with anxious gaze on the litter, which was now ascending the mountain.

"It is Valois," cried Gabrielle, "I can see the *fleur-de-lis* on the litter."

"No," shouted the governor almost in a passion with his fair daughter, "you do his Majesty wrong! what, travel like a woman?"

"And why not?" replied the lady, "he dresses like a monk."

"I do not like his taste certainly," rejoined the Marquis; "but there is one now spurring up the causeway, who will soon change our speculations into certainty."

Though it was beneath the dignity of the governor to be present at the arrival of stranger-guests, yet a tolerably strong muster was made at the gate-tower, as much for pomp as security. At the demand of a stranger who with his servant had preceded the escort, the gates were opened; and Pomini in a dress, the fantastic compound of the habiliments of a page and a gentleman, presented himself with his men, and bowing very low, inquired the name and rank of the visitors.

"I ask of the Marquis De Cœuvres," replied the stranger, "the hospitality of D'Usson for the Queen of Navarre."

A flush of joy overspread the face of Pomini at these words. To have the honour of receiving a queen was worth listening to the hundred times repeated stories of the governor; and so impressed was the seneschal with his good fortune, that he

resolved not to communicate the intelligence to the Marquis, who, in duty bound, would have descended to meet the majestic daughter of France.

"Now is arrived the crisis of my fortune," said Pomini to himself; "the Queen of Navarre can do more with her family than the old gentleman my master."

Fortunately for the consequence of the seneschal, the two pages of the household were present with the troops; they were showy youths, and would not have disgraced the Louvre.

"Her Majesty is most welcome to D'Usson!" replied Pomini to the demand of her attendant.

The stranger, who was no other than our friend De Nevailles, saw before him a tall, well-limbed man, with handsome features certainly, but destitute of noble expression or military daring, and was consequently at a loss to determine his rank; for though the decisiveness of his reply indicated authority, yet De Cœuvres, as the Baron had been informed, was an old man. Determined, however, to apply the touchstone to his presumption, he said quietly—

"Her Majesty will most gratefully thank you for this courtesy, Monseigneur."

At the word, Monseigneur, a titter was observ-

able on the faces of all the group, save that of the would-be L'Isle du Marais, who was at a loss whether to accept or reject the proffered honour. The implied discovery of the pretender was not unobserved by Antoine, who had followed his master, and now echoed him, saying—

"Ay, and her hungry servants too, most illustrious Seigneur!"

Pomini found himself involved in a dilemma which might be productive of ridiculous consequences; but nowise daunted, he determined to brave it out, in spite of the ill-concealed mirth of the household and the military.

He advanced beyond the gateway to meet the royal litter; and the curtains being drawn aside, he beheld, for the first time, the far-famed Queen of Navarre, whose brilliant complexion was heightened by the excitement of the journey, and the busy thoughts which agitated her mind. Beside her sat a lady, with whom the reader is more familiar than the Seneschal of D'Usson;—it was Emilie, whom Margaret, faithful to her promise, had demanded of and obtained her release from, the convent at Avignon.

Since the glorious victory at Coutras, Margaret had been silently preparing to quit the uncertain protection of the Queen-mother, and seek, through

the aid of her consort, a retreat, to which her *protégée* might repair with security. But in that age, as in the present, money was the sinew of motion; and of this necessary commodity, the Queen of Navarre was extremely deficient. She had, in truth, been cheated by her brothers out of her father's legacy, destined for her provision, in addition to the domains apportioned to a daughter of France. It was in vain she applied to the Queen of France to supply the deficiency; Catherine had enough to do in paying spies, providing for favourites, and making donations to the troops and partisans of her son's family. This being the case, the Queen of Navarre resolved to pay herself, when and wherever she could; but as the period was approaching when Emilie would be forced to comply with the terms of her noviciate at Avignon, Margaret saw the necessity of hastening to rescue her from the threatened doom of the veil.

The battle of the barricades, and consequent flight of her brother, happening at this time, the scheming Princess saw a fair opportunity of escape, which she accomplished through the assistance of the good-natured Father Roquelaure, who accompanied her to the south, as his presence was necessary to extricate her charge from the con-

ventual imprisonment to which she had been subjected by Catherine.

The trio, attended by the faithful servants of the Princess, were travelling to implore the protection of the King of Navarre, when they fortunately came in contact with the Baron de Nevailles, whose restless mind was leading him towards Avignon, with the expectation of discovering the retreat of Emilie, ere the threatening storm of political warfare hurried him within its vortex. The joy of the lovers may easily be conceived; the more especially, as neither Margaret nor the confessor frowned on the meeting.

The Queen of Navarre was indeed in want of the Baron's aid, which she joyfully accepted; nor did she object to his attentions to her young friend, if he were content to live in hope, and without requiring to be informed of the secret history of their friendship towards each other, and mutual dislike of the Queen-mother.

Navarre was known to be in Auvergne, and thither the happy travellers proceeded in search of him, arriving before D'Usson in the manner we have just related. A brilliant idea entered the mind of Margaret, when she beheld the lofty rocks on which the fortress was built, its impregnability, and romantic site; but, without communicating her

sudden resolve, she simply requested the Baron to ask of De Cœuvres the hospitality of the castle for a daughter of France.

Flushed with her scheme, she drew aside the curtains on approaching the gate-tower, and at the expected presence of the old Governor; but in his place stood the smirking and bowing Pomini, who was dazzled with the beauty of the fair voyagers, and quite forgot the graceful Gabrielle. Margaret smiled inwardly at his officiousness, but she saw at a glance that he was her own, and might be moulded to her purpose. This was sufficient to induce her to return his civilities with condescension, and make him the proudest of men. He already fancied himself Monsieur L'Isle du Marais, and even went so far as to presume on the possible acquisition of a baron's coronet and mantling.

The cortege passed into the interior court, where the Queen and Emilie alighted, and were conducted by the enraptured seneschal into the hall. Great was the indignation of the loyal governor, when one of the pages ran to inform him that his visitor was the Queen of Navarre; but as it was too late to proceed to the court-yard, where he could only dispute with his servant in the honour of the reception, he wisely resolved to take up a

position with his daughter in their saloon of state; and in order to increase the group, the page was desired to bring his fellow immediately, that they twain might be in readiness to do honour to royalty, and reflect a proper dignity on the rank of the governor.

But for this *coup d'état*, there was more than abundant time; for Pomini indulged in his usual artifice with visitors, of conducting them through the entire suite of rooms of the castle, ere he introduced them to the Marquis; commenting the while on the antique beauty of the furniture, the lofty proportions of the chambers, and the historical importance of the royal chateau.

"Stay! Stay! Monsieur!" said the fatigued Queen of Navarre; "has not the Marquis a fair daughter—a pearl of price? Let us not delay in doing her honour."

"Her beauty can only be eclipsed by the bright luminaries before whom I now stand!" replied the assiduous and crafty seneschal: "and your Majesty shall see her soon."

But Monsieur Pomini had something yet in store for his new friends, ere their eyes were blessed with the presence of the Lady Gabrielle. To the surprise of the Queen and her suite, he opened a small door behind the tapestry of the

last chamber, and disappeared from view of his visitors, but soon returned with a bundle of torches, which were speedily lighted.

"What! torches in day-time?" cried Margaret, in surprise.

"Your Majesty must consider that it is the fault of the architect, not mine," replied the obsequious seneschal.

Any one but De Nevailles would have dissuaded the Queen from proceeding farther, but his curiosity and love of eccentricity were deeply interested in the *dénouement* of this strange proceeding, and he resolved to let the seneschal go the full length of his line.

The tapestry was put aside, and, one by one, following each other, the visitants passed through the narrow door-way, and entered on a stone gallery or corridor. The light of the torches displayed the rudeness of the masonry, and the awful prison-like gloom of the gallery. The royal party began to doubt the sincerity of their guide.

"Is De Cœuvres a hermit?" exclaimed Margaret;—"does he live in a cell?"

Pomini made no reply, for he was preparing for his last effort.

Suddenly he stopped, and waved aloft his torch, commanding the attendants to do the same. At

his invitation the party approached the spot whereon he stood, but were awe-struck with the seeming horror of their position. They were no longer enclosed between the walls of the gallery, but found themselves standing on a balcony, projecting into the murky space. Above and beneath was utter darkness;—the partial, dim atmosphere of light which surrounded them, was just sufficient to make the awful gloom visible.

De Nevailles caught hold of the seneschal. "Why this mystery?" said he, not knowing whether it were prudent to express alarm.

"Look!" exclaimed the seneschal, beckoning the party to approach the iron-railing which skirted the balcony. Impelled by mingled curiosity and dread, Margaret and her friends ventured to obey Pomini's bidding.

"Now watch the descending light!" exclaimed the mysterious functionary;—and at the words, he and his domestics threw their torches into the abyss.

The glaring, whirling meteors, as they fell, illumined the cavernous sides of the descent, and impressed the awe-struck gazers with terror of the dreadful gulph over which they stood. After many a mazy giration, the lights reached the bottom, and burnt flickeringly in the abyss.

The group surveyed them from above with awe.

"Something shines close to the red-light of that farthest torch!" cried De Nevailles, who was the first to break silence.

"Very likely," said Pomini, in a careless tone; the skulls are scattered about in profusion!"

A cry of horror arose from the fair living dames at this announcement; nor was their dread diminished by discovering that they were now in total darkness.

"By St. Hubert!" exclaimed the Baron, "it would be only doing justice to throw you to the spirits beneath! Tell us, what means this? or you shall rue your mischief!"

"Where those torches burn are the dungeons of D'Usson," replied Pomini. "There, his Majesty Louis, the eleventh of that name, of happy memory, kept the state prisoners, whose treason was manifest. Your Majesty's ancestor," continued the seneschal, speaking to the Queen of Navarre, "was a wise Prince—no one could escape from these depths."

"Let us away from the horrid sight," cried the Queen, who had retained the hand of Emilie out of fear.

"There is no danger from this conceited fool!" whispered De Nevailles, who was close to Mademoiselle.

As the road was straight, no great difficulty was found by the visitors in groping their way out of the gallery into the genial light of day, and the warm tapestried chamber. But their anger now vented itself against the seneschal; he was surrounded by a circle of inquisitors, who threatened him with every punishment which they could think of.

"If I had been anxious only to revenge an insult to my sovereign," said De Nevailles, "your body would have been flung after the torches."

"But why show us these curiosities when the Marquis is waiting?" exclaimed Margaret, who could not repress a smile at the singular occurrence.

Pomini, who was taken off his guard by the cheerful speech of the Queen, replied with *naïveté*, that since the visit of the Abbe Bourdeille de Brantome to D'Usson, he had taken his advice, which was to display the dreary depths of the prison caverns to visitors, ere he introduced them into the presence of the Lady Gabrielle; that her lightsome beauty might strike the beholders with all the force of intense contrast.

A peal of laughter followed this explanation, which was uttered in a tone that at once displayed

the vanity and weakness of the seneschal, at the same time that it bespoke the sincerity of the impulse.

"Ah! the Abbe De Brantome is a man I reverence," said De Nevailles; "his wit leaves a rough mark on every softer mind it comes in collision with."

Meanwile, the outraged dignity of the Marquis was exposed to further degradation by the delay; —he walked about the saloon, fretting away the wearisome minutes with his daughter and the two pages, the sole remnant of a household, busily engaged in their several offices of taking charge of the visitors' horses, attending to the comforts of the fatigued servants of her Majesty, and, lastly, but more honourably, swelling the train of the magnificent Pomini.

Margaret and her friends were speedily restored to good humour, and followed the seneschal to the reception-chamber of the governor, laughing and talking the while of the eccentricity of their guide. Their gay, debonair bearing, and sportive looks, contrasted laughably with the traces of ill-humour on the face of the Marquis, who inwardly vowed revenge upon the pompous functionary.

De Cœuvres had been a gallant in his season of pride, and retained the feeling in his old age;

and Margaret was a divinity in whose presence care was wont to hide its head in disguise. He bent his knee before the daughter of France, and his homage was rendered as much to her beauty as her rank;—Pomini was forgotten when the Queen of Navarre bent forward gracefully with a show of raising the loyal governor of D'Usson.

While these salutations passed between the principal performers, the two younger and rival beauties had leisure to survey each other's attractions and power. Gabrielle wondered whom might be the graceful companion of royalty, with her air of birth and romantic features, which had the same fascination over the fair chatelaine of D'Usson, as they had exercised on Villa Franca, when he first beheld them in the Louvre. Emilie was not less struck with the charms of Gabrielle, whose stature beamed with light.

In the eyes of all the spectators, save one, Gabrielle bore away the palm of beauty; she looked a magnificent creation, like Venus on the ocean's surface—a dazzling splendour;—no second glance was needed to appreciate her power. Emilie could boast of no atmosphere of light—no ray as of divinity; her beauty was earth-born; in the gallery of creation, a connoisseur might pass her by, attracted by brighter luminaries, but when

his eyes had drank their fill of these, he would have returned spell-bound to gaze on the picturesque features, of which he had only previously caught a momentary glance.

Gabrielle had also the advantages of circumstances; her dress was arranged with care, and at leisure; her hair bound with jewels, which glittered among auburn tresses; Emilie was, on the contrary, in her travelling apparel, and careless of display.

De Nevailles, as may be imagined, was much struck with the fair chatelaine; and his thoughts recurred to the advice of the Abbe De Brantome. Roquelaure, who had been remarkably silent since his entry into the castle, now found leisure to exchange a few words with the seneschal, who rejoiced the heart of the worthy cordelier with a prospect of good-living, to which his travelling stomach had been, for some time, a stranger. D'Usson appeared to his reverence a most desirable abode; nothing was wanting to the comforts of life; wealth, profusion, and plenty seemed to abound, and bright eyes also to gladden the daily feast. He never felt a greater contempt for the monks of La Chartreux (since called Trappists) than when listening to the account which Pomini narrated of the heaped-up stores of provisions in the fortress,

and daily supplies from the peasants of the valleys. Who would wish to quit such a home?

When the usual civilities of meeting had been exchanged between the governor and the royal guest, her suite was severally introduced to the notice of himself and his fair daughter. De Nevailles was passed off as her Majesty's secretary —and the lady Emilie, as Mademoiselle De Boufrement, an orphan, and attendant on the Queen. The office of the cordelier needed no explanation, save that his Christian name of Henri was substituted for the name of his family, which latter he had borne at his convent, to distinguish him from another Henri of equal piety, though of less growth.

These matters settled, and the ladies made friends, or seemingly such, Margaret was fairly domiciled at Chateau D'Usson. Never was company better assorted to prevent *ennui*. The Marquis fancied himself young again, and became the slave of her Majesty; Pomini was in disgrace, and deprived of his triple post, but for the office of steward a glad substitute was found in Roquelaure;—while De Nevailles ventured to speak to Gabrielle oftener, and more pointedly, than became his prior attentions to the *protégée* of Margaret. The Queen herself was silently

plotting an affair of great moment, and paid little attention to the proceedings of those around her, except in the silent encouragement which she afforded Pomini, and her, at length, successful intercession in his favour with the governor. Gabrielle cared neither for De Nevailles, the Queen, or even her youthful rival, save in occasionally piquing her jealousy by listening to the Baron. While Emilie, the most unhappy of the dwellers in D'Usson, was alternately indignant and smooth-tempered with her eccentric lover.

One day, while De Nevailles was listening to the comments of Gabrielle on a favourite Provençal poet, he observed that Emilie suddenly left the room. It might be, he thought, an accidental occurrence, yet it awoke in him a sense of remorse for daring to trifle with the feelings of her for whom he had cherished fond hopes, while hopes were all his love's inheritance; and whom he had now slighted for a passing, though brilliant meteor. Gabrielle had indeed captivated his eyes, and nothing more; though with the tyranny of a lover he had suffered his admiration to assume a character of too outward a form.

At once repentant, he resolved to sue for his pardon, and framing an excuse for quitting Gabrielle, he sought out the injured Emilie. She

had retired to the terrace, to brood over her disappointment, amid the varied and romantic scenes which met the view on every side.

"Emilie!" exclaimed the Baron, as he stole on her unperceived.

She turned round, but was too much offended, or grieved, to reply.

"Speak, Emilie! but one word!" continued De Nevailles;—"I am penitent and full of shame."

But De Boufrement had lived with Margaret and the Queen-mother, and imbibed a portion of their spirit. She was proudly silent.

"Have you not resolution, Emilie, to forgive my infirmity—my folly—it was nothing more—a transient cloud on our happiness. Summer days have such, but they melt away as soon as formed."

"You shall see I have resolution, Monseigneur!" replied Mademoiselle, calmy. She drew from her bosom the sketch of herself, taken from Villa Franca in the Queen's picture-gallery, and which she had preserved as a token of their first meeting. Ere the Baron could prevent the catastrophe, the paper was borne fluttering among the shelving rocks beneath the fortress.

As he rushed forward, though too late to rescue the lost treasure, a laugh reminded the lovers that they were watched. It was the Queen of Navarre,

who had beheld the rencontre, though without knowing its cause.

"This is too bad, Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Margaret, "to set your knight such an impossible task! Would you have him fling himself after the tender epistle; or are his labours to commence upward from the valley?"

"What, angry!" continued the Queen, after a pause;—"Well! I am sure it is the fault of the Baron! But leave him to me, Emilie, and I will impose such a penance for his crimes that he will never forget till the day of his death!"

The lady retired without looking at her lover. Margaret laughed at this demonstration of anger.

"Never mind her, De Nevailles," said the Queen, "there must be moral contrasts as well as those presented to us by Pomini the pompous, now restored to his seneschalship."

"But I am in the wrong, as your Majesty would have perceived, had not your attention been so much occupied of late," replied the Baron.

"Then I have no time now to upbraid you," rejoined Margaret:—"Have you considered my intended conduct, with respect to D'Usson, in the light of a matter of conscience?"

"That is a fitter study for Father Henri!" replied De Nevailles, smiling.

"I dare scarce trust him with the secret," said the Queen; "it would be too hard a strain on his faith, though I might, perhaps, make certain of his complaisance."

"Precedents in your Majesty's favour," rejoined De Nevailles, "crowd upon me on every side. But there is one homely argument which I hold above every other;—that in the present situation of your family, if you delay much longer seizing the rights which have been unjustly denied you—there will soon be nothing left for you to take. The case appears to stand thus:—The legacy demised by your royal father has never been paid over into your Majesty's hands; it has been spent without your concurrence, in propping up a feeble government, and your repeated solicitations have been laughed at;—your Majesty smiles!"

"I imagined myself in the court of Parliament, and listening to its president!" said the Queen of Navarre.

The Baron bowed as gravely as any president, and retaining an attitude as stiff and formal as the most witless advocate, continued:—

"As long as those whom you sue, hold their present rank and possessions, your Majesty has nought to fear on the score of inability to satisfy your just demand, if inclination should lead them

into that path. But you have already waited till their resources are considerably lessened, and ere another session be passed, they may themselves be destitute of even as much as you ask for. What course does prudence dictate? The same which governed the actions of your Majesty's unfortunate and lamented brother, François D'Alençon. He saw the crown about to be reft away from the family, through the incapacity of his elder brother, and he said to himself;—'This is a question which concerns me, for if Valois suffer his diadem to be snatched off by a rebel, my presumptive birth-right will be for ever foreclosed! Shall I suffer this? No!'——His illustrious sister, whom I have now, in all humility, the honour of addressing, knows the result of this reasoning—his vigorous policy—his enterprising spirit—his mercenary army and feeble officers. Let me stop here, for I see your Majesty is moved."

"The same reasoning," continued De Nevailles, after a pause, to allow Margaret to recover herself; "applies with two-fold power to your own case. Your birth-right is in jeopardy—that, indeed, which you ought long since to have received; whereas, the claims of Monsieur, though justly grounded, were only prospective. Will you hesitate to adopt his decisive policy—aye, and with firmer

purpose? If all that Valois possesses, either of his own, or in trust, be taken away, can your Majesty and your servants subsist on whining consolation, which he may probably in his remorse offer you?"

"I am firm to my own conviction!" cried Margaret with energy.

"Then D'Usson is your own," replied the Baron.

"Navarre would help us," continued he, "and my liege cannot be far off—yet it would hurt your reputation as a good catholic to allow heretics to supplant those of the true faith. My retainers are with Navarre, yet we had better trust to our own resources."

"We have not a Machiavel to outwit," said Margaret smiling.

"I should have less scruple if we *were* opposed to one," rejoined De Nevailles:—"I confess my only regret springs from the *necessity* of ejecting De Cœuvres and his fair daughter, who live at D'Usson as a natural home."

"Nay, Baron!" cried the Queen with emphasis; "do not fall into the weakness of our friend Guise—let us have no obstacle in the shape of courtesy—it would be out of season. Besides, De Cœuvres is getting old; and, though out of a sense of honour, he may not resign, yet to quit

the peaceable old man of a responsible and warlike post at a crisis of danger, would be felt by himself, after a time, as a blessing. As for Gabrielle, she would be nearer Paris at her own Chateau de Cœuvres; she would not remain long hid! I could ensure her admirers by scores, serious or frivolous, as she might desire."

"I am thoroughly convinced," said De Nevailles.

"I feel also the hospitable treatment of the Marquis," cried the Queen of Navarre; "but he has absolved the obligation by his foolish advances. He has had the folly, as you may perhaps have noticed, of addressing me with more courtesy than becomes his rank or mine."

"It will work to our own ends," replied the Baron; "and your Majesty must bear the ridicule."

"Envoy like!" exclaimed Margaret, "you look only to the result! Nót a word of pity for the inconvenience I suffer."

"You are a daughter of Catherine de Medicis!" replied the Baron.

"Pomini too is as assiduous as the Marquis," said Margaret without replying to what was both compliment and reproof;—"he may be of use to us!"

"The seneschal, though vain, ignorant, and ser-

vile, is not the fool which his conduct would declare him to be," rejoined De Nevailles, "for he has his own purpose to serve evidently. He can be made to declare for us with a little management, though we must take care to sift out and flatter his own cherished ends—for the wretch is selfish."

"So you would deprive me of a humble slave, Baron," cried the Queen of Navarre; "his servility, according to your explanation, is not admiration, but interested selfishness."

"The very same," replied the Baron; "though I know not what his mouth is opening for. But at any rate we will drop into it a tempting bait."

"Have you discovered the reason why my good consort made pretence of blockading D'Usson?" asked the Queen.

"I cannot tell—it is beyond my conjecture," replied the Baron. "When I left him, to travel to Avignon, he had no such foolish idea. The site of his late encampment was pointed out to me by the Marquis—I will show it to your Majesty!"

They walked to the parapet of the terrace; and De Nevailles was pointing out the distant position which the King of Navarre had occupied, when their attention was arrested by observing Pomini loitering on the battlements below.

As soon as the obsequious seneschal beheld the

consort of Navarre, he left the silent company of the sentinels for the more genial presence of Margaret; and soon reached the terrace, approaching her with his usual bows and affected steps.

"We have disturbed your contemplation, Monsieur Pomini," said the Queen of Navarre; "your brow was as thoughtful as though you had been governor of the fortress. Care will soon cover your forehead with wrinkles—I thought you had been wiser."

"Yet I do assure your Majesty," said the pleased functionary, "that I am not in the same awful dilemma as our governor."

"And whence originates his trouble?" asked the Queen, "has he repented of pardoning your error?"

"Why," replied Pomini smiling, "I do not know how he should be troubled. It is his custom at this season of the year, to visit his lands in the south, to look after his hay-harvest. He goes there twice a-year—the second journey to garner up his corn, or remove it to D'Usson, as may happen to be most prudent; but at present he does not know whether to go or stay."

"Does he fear Navarre?" cried De Nevailles.

"O! no!" replied the seneschal; "the King of Navarre being in the province would not hinder

his journey. The cause of the dilemma is nearer home; he does not like to leave his guests?"

"Then propose to him that you go instead," said the Baron, who was disposed to fathom still deeper the character and motives of both governor and seneschal.

"*Ma foi!*" cried Pomini, in a natural tone, and laughing the while, "that would never suit Monseigneur: he would fret himself to death with the apprehension of being cheated of part of his harvest?"

"Then persuade him to travel thither without delay," said Margaret, "and threaten, if he waver, that you will start by yourself; it will alarm his avarice:—does he put confidence in you?"

"More than in others, though less than honesty deserves," replied Pomini.

"It is a pity he should suffer through us," cried the Queen; "and if he have such a dislike to being absent from D'Usson, let him take as many of his garrison as he can spare. Soldiers are mowers by profession, and would work as quick as magic."

"That has been his custom," observed the seneschal; "but the Huguenots are in Auvergne."

"They would not attack the residence of their chief's consort," said Margaret; "neither

would the gallant chief himself annoy his fugitive wife, who has been forced by the enemies of her house to fly here for safety. His nature is too noble to behave so unkindly."

"Bravo!" thought De Nevailles to himself, "she now equals her mother."

"D'Usson," continued the royal diplomatist, "would laugh to scorn the artillery of all France. It is impregnable, save to the ingress of the birds of the air."

"Your Majesty speaks most wisely," said Pomini; "I will persuade Monseigneur, the governor, to go to his estate."

"It would please me to observe your own skill and conduct in command of the fortress," observed the Queen of Navarre, with a most gracious look:—"I have conceived great hopes of you."

"I should hold my power during his absence," said Pomini bowing, and blushing at the compliment, "at your Majesty's will to do as you pleased with me."

"We must take care," said De Nevailles to himself, "that fate obliges you to hold this promise good—it shall soon be put to the test."

"Your name is new to me," said Margaret speaking to the seneschal in her most winning tones; "but though unknown at court, your man-

ners, I am sure, would have sway, were you once placed there."

This was spoken carelessly, and without any premeditation, as the Queen had not, in truth, discovered the main-spring of Pomini's moral being. But the light which flashed from his eyes, at these words, was not unnoticed by the sagacious woman. She continued to ply him in the same strain, while De Nevailles, who had been watching intently to catch a glimpse of the master-thought which guided the conduct of the seneschal, seconded the policy of the Princess with a series of questions and remarks, which cut across and laid bare the inner machinery of his mind, with its secret motives, its impulses, and aspirations.

He was in the hands of skilful operators, who left him no chance but in a free and candid confession, to which point he was brought and cajoled by the flattering promises of the artful Queen. But the citadel of his fidelity, whether weak or strong, was wisely left for another *coup d'état et d'armes.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

Charmante Gabrielle,
Percé de mille darts,
Quand la gloire m'appelle
A la suite de Mars,
Cruelle departie!
Malheureux jour!
Que ne suis-je sans vie,
Ou sans amour!
Partagez ma couronne,
Le prix de ma valeur;
Je la tiens de Bellone,
Tenez-la de mon cœur:
Cruelle departie!
Malheureux jour!
Que ne suis-je sans vie,
Ou sans amour!

HENRI QUATRE.

THE Marquis de Cœuvres was indeed smitten with the charms of his royal guest; the old courtier, who had figured at the Louvre in the reign of the first Francis—who had subsequently retired from a life of gaiety to devote his time to the education of an only daughter—and who had since been called from retirement to take charge of a fortress of the highest importance as a retreat and

place of refuge, had not acquired wisdom sufficient to guard him against a superannuated passion. Had he brought to mind ever so slightly the experience acquired during three reigns, that old men in love are only countenanced by the objects of their devotion to make use of them either to their destruction or loss of honour, he would have suspected the favours of Margaret, who smiled upon his airs of gallantry, and concealed her contempt of his folly.

Until the arrival of the Queen of Navarre, his mind had been gradually becoming uneasy at the change in the conduct of Gabrielle, who, as he imagined, and it remains to be seen with what truth, was neglecting her filial attentions to nourish a secret feeling to which he was a stranger.

But when the Queen of Hearts and Navarre became a denizen of the aerial D'Usson, the Marquis forgot his daughter in watching the footsteps of his royal visitor.

It had been, as Pomini explained to the guests, his custom to visit his estates twice every year, and on these occasions, the greater portion of the garrison accompanied him to gather in the hay or corn harvest, according to the season of the journey. But he was now in a dilemma. On one hand was the captivating Navarrese Queen, with her ready

smiles and unseen treachery; on the other, his harvest, the accounts of the steward of the estate, and not least, his invariable custom,—the latter an influence all-powerful with an old man. But there was still a wavering of resolution; a fear of offending the Queen—of leaving D'Usson under the care of an arrogant underling like Pomini, whom he doubted not, would give himself the airs of royalty itself during his absence. The alternative of sending the seneschal to clear accounts with the steward was equally horrifying; Pomini was not dishonest, he would have spurned such a paltry crime as a sure blot in his anticipated escutcheon, but of this feeling the Marquis was ignorant, and saw only the meeting of two rogues, and its probable consequences.

He was in this state of mind when the vain chamberlain, instructed by Margaret, endeavoured to conquer his irresolution, by offering his own services in lieu. This tender, which was made more earnestly than characterized the usual deportment of the seneschal, roused the suspicions of the old man, and determined him that Pomini should stay at home.

His choice decided on, Jean La Roche with three-fourths of the slender garrison, were ordered to prepare themselves for marching by night-fall,

as it was the intention of the governor to conceal his departure from D'Usson, lest intelligence might be conveyed to the Huguenots, whom, it was reported, were still in the northern part of the province.

"Pomini," said the Marquis, after he had reiterated his instructions to the seneschal; "let me not have to reproach you on my return for your neglect of my authority. Do not fancy yourself governor here, and dance her Majesty over the castle as though you were a grand Seigneur. I have told the Queen of Navarre, in the hearing of her jesting secretary, who I see is much amused with your absurdities, to consider herself as mistress of D'Usson, and to treat you according to your proper station."

Pomini, who longed to see his master, as the neighbouring valleys were called, *sous* D'Usson, promised compliance.

"Now, Jean La Roche," cried the Marquis, mounting an idle and well-fed steed, after waving his hand to Gabrielle and the visitors, who stood on the balcony over the door of the inner court; "you are ever grumbling at your confinement. Let your comrades have a specimen of your energies. Our road is free from the enemy, but I know not

but that they may have left spies abroad; to-morrow's sun must see us safe beyond pursuit!"

"Ah!" said La Roche, whispering to Robert the recruit; "that is not the way Marshal De Biron used to talk to us—but it matters not how a commander speaks to soldiers going to make hay for an avaricious old man!"

The Marquis and his troops were certainly favoured by the night, which was as gloomy as they could have wished; and they left the castle to the care of the exulting Pomini, who joyfully shut the gates upon the old governor and his suspicions.

Margaret was too much agitated to retire to rest; her mind was busy with its long prepared scheme; the moment seemed at hand for its execution, and she summoned De Nevailles to her council.

"Baron!" exclaimed she, on his approach; "we have ridden ourselves of De Cœuvres! Shall we not open our views to Pomini? He is half prepared, by his own hopes and our promises, to join us—a word more, and he is our own!"

"But how shall we behave to the lady Gabrielle; —how broach our intention to her?" asked De Nevailles.

Margaret had never suspected the attentions of the Baron to the fair daughter of the governor, or

this sympathy at an untimely hour would have called forth all her anger.

"What! you do not like to face her in my cause," cried the Queen of Navarre, laughing; "but remember, my fate is linked with the fate of Emilie—her fortunes are my fortunes—her destiny is my destiny. At the Louvre you professed yourself desirous of passing through fiery ordeals in her service;—your friendship has been accepted, Monseigneur!—you are, indeed, our friend. When Pomini, with the assistance of our servants, shall place the keys of this fortress in my hands, will you not oblige me, by telling Mademoiselle, that for the future, the Marquis De Cœuvres, may be hay-making all his life."

"I will summon Pomini instantly!" said the Baron, leaving the saloon for that purpose. "What rare creatures women are to make us ashamed of our weaknesses," muttered De Nevailles, as he passed along the corridor:—"No flinching—no delay—no absurd kindness or courtesy to which we fools are subject! I hope the gentle Emilie will prove of this spirit, or the chances will be against me with a meek partner. I am glad her anger is so lasting; if she would only knock down a page in her fury *à la Montpensier*, my good fortune would be placed beyond a doubt."

The seneschal was not more surprised than pleased at the request of the Baron to accompany him to a secret interview with the Queen of Navarre. In the interval, Margaret had prepared herself for her spiriting. When her expected guests entered the saloon, she was observed looking earnestly through the window at the darkened night. De Nevailles approached her with the calmness of one accustomed to intercourse with royalty; Pomini could not keep pace with him, nor, indeed, could any one, in his place, who bowed at every second step.

"Pomini!" exclaimed the Queen, turning round, and exhibiting a fierceness of expression, and speaking in a more determined tone, than the seneschal had ever witnessed in a lady of rank.

The incipient L'Isle Du Marais stopped short.

"Are you not discontented with your present rank in this castle?" continued Margaret.

"Very much so," replied the surprised Pomini; "I may tell your Majesty that I am in a wrong position in the world—I am in an intermediate condition—worse than slavery."

"I am aware of it," rejoined the Queen, "you are nothing, when you deserve to be something. Do you dare climb to a nobler elevation."

"I would rub the skin off my limbs to do so,"

answered the wondering seneschal, who was, however, determined to chime in closely with her Majesty's questions.

"To what extent does your conscience stretch —in plain words, how far would you go to attain your object. Speak boldly, and quickly too—for I am burning with impatience."

"I would, in the first place, be a credited gentleman of letters-patent," replied Pomini, without taking the least time for pausing;—"and I would go as far as my escutcheon would cover my actions."

"Well said!" cried the Queen:—"how are you affected towards the Marquis?"

"If I were to become a gentleman, I should feel myself forced to call him to account for his abuse of me, though, in my subordinate capacity, I am willing to confess he takes no more than a passing heed of my misdoings, and is fond of my society," replied the seneschal, wondering what more was in store for him.

"Do you expect your letters-patent through the influence of the governor?" asked Margaret.

"I did a season ago," answered Pomini; "but if your Majesty will excuse my boldness, and a reflection unpleasant to your ears, I should say that the King of France will very soon be in no

condition to grant them; and then my long expectant hopes will be left to the mercy of his great enemy. I have heard your royal brother will be deposed."

"He will not suffer that degradation," said the Queen of Navarre, speciously; "he will resign the throne to save disgrace."

This declaration at once crushed the hopes of the seneschal.

"Emilie should be here to receive a lesson from her protectress," thought De Nevailles, looking upon the downcast Pomini.

"If one bridge were to break," said Margaret, "would you throw yourself in despair into the stream, or look above and below for another passage."

"I wish to be a gentleman of letters-patent," replied Pomini:—"I would prefer being *ancien gentilhomme*, but that I know to be impossible."

"You seem to understand me," said Margaret.

"Your Majesty would be more intelligible if you could point out the bridge by which I am to pass the stream of ignoble life," retorted the emboldened seneschal.

"I will!" replied the Queen of Navarre;—"the King, my husband, whose forces are in this province, and whose councillor this gentleman is,

shall erect a territory for you in any province of his dominions; you could not sit more honourably than among the ancient noblesse of Navarre and Bearn. Say! Monseigneur!" continued Margaret, addressing the Baron; is not my proposal practicable?"

"You see before you, Monsieur Pomini, the Baron De Nevailles," said the Baron, to the astonished seneschal; "all France credits my influence with the King of Navarre, and I promise you, that you shall have your letters-patent."

"But my lands are in Languedoc," exclaimed Pomini, "a branch of the Rhone encircles my corn-fields—and the old seignorage was L'Isle Du Marais. I would be called by that name."

The Baron turned, apparently to adjust the belt of his sword, but in reality, to conceal a smile which he found it impossible to repress.

"You shall have any name you please in Navarre, and if my power reaches as far, in France," said Margaret,—"but now for the service—for you must be aware that all honours are held by such a tenure."

Pomini bowed; and resolved to trust to fortune for the Languedoc creation.

In a few words, the Queen narrated the quarrel with her family and the deprivation which she had

suffered from the non-payment of her father's legacy; her determination to rescue whatever was available out of the wreck of the fortunes of the Valois dynasty; and that her choice had fallen on the Chateau D'Usson, which once in her possession, could never be retaken.

Let me be Chatelaine D'Usson," exclaimed the Queen, in an impassioned tone; "and you shall be all that Navarre can make you, and the governor of the fortress."

Despairing as Pomini did of the re-establishment of Valois, and fascinated also with the offers of the Princess, who gave him no time for reflection, he closed with the terms proposed.

"Is the lady Gabrielle to reside here?" asked the seneschal, during the discussion of the steps necessary to be taken.

"Mademoiselle D'Estrées has many friends, I perceive," said the Queen, darting a sly look at the Baron. "She may live at D'Usson if she so desire it; but I can scarcely believe she would wish to dwell elsewhere than with the Marquis."

The night was chiefly spent in preparing for the morrow's *coup-de-main*. While Margaret was left to gather what rest she might, in the few eventful hours which intervened before the moment selected for striking the blow, De Nevailles, Pomini, and

Antoine, to whom the plot was communicated, and who entered into it with all the zeal of a Gascon, repaired to the armoury, and having selected arms and armour sufficient to equip the servants of her Majesty and of the Baron, which was all the force the confederates could bring into the field against the remnant of the garrison, they proceeded to visit the battlements, to examine every point available for resistance or offence.

This survey completed, there remained only to arm their adherents, and wait patiently till the early parade, the hour chosen for the *coup d'assai*.

"You will gain more in one day, Monsieur Pomini," said the Baron, "than you have done in all your life beside."

"And yet," replied the seneschal, "I shall have to wait with uncertainty for what I have toiled for from my youth."

This reply was dictated by a lurking remonstrance of conscience which would not be altogether quieted; but with such a man as Pomini, the "still small voice within," was obliged to be circumspect; it durst not attack its master openly on the score of infidelity to the governor;—that was an admitted crime, and one contemned also by the ambitious seneschal, who would allow of nothing to

stand in the way of his long cherished hopes; but the monitor, resolute not to give up the contest without a struggle for the honour of human nature, learned a lesson of art, and whispered its owner, that he was sacrificing his character and reputation fruitlessly—that all would be lost, without the recompense for which he had surrendered up his honour, being gained. This was a most reasonable twinge; one to which no man could object; and gave birth to the dissatisfied speech in reply to the triumphing assertion of the Baron.

But Pomini was too far gone to recede; he neglected the monitor by feasting in imagination on the flattering prospects held out to his ambition; though his features still retained a moody expression, which gave great alarm to De Nevailles.

By break of day the servants of the visitors were perfectly instructed in the venturous part they had to perform; nothing remained but to wait patiently till the signal was uttered for their active co-operation with the chiefs of the plot.

Margaret was seated in her chamber when the beat of the drum summoned the little garrison to the inner court of the fortress. Gabrielle had not shown herself to her visitors since the previous evening; Emilie was revenging herself on the Baron

by avoiding his presence; and the Queen sat alone, her trembling frame and anxious countenance unobserved of any one.

It was the crisis of her fortune, and she sat listening to catch the expected sounds of contest or triumph; her friends were so few, scarcely six or seven able hands against three times their number, that she almost dreaded to hear of the result; though ever and anon, as her spirit rose high, she felt an inclination to rush to the scene of action, and cheer on her friends to victory.

She listened in vain. No sound broke upon her ear; neither of tumult, of fire-arms, nor the cries of combatants; all was as still as on ordinary occasions. After a while the very repose became alarming; she imagined that her friends had despaired of success, and given up the attempt.

This idea was worse than the contemplation of defeat; she could bear it no longer, and rushed to the door to quiet or confirm her distracting fears. But the appearance of Lisette, with looks indicative of alarm, checked her intention, and she stayed to question the girl.

"What has frightened you?" said the Queen in a hurried voice.

"Antoine!" replied the waiting-maid of Emilie,

after a pause, in which it seemed doubtful, whether she was not inventing a reply.

"Antoine!" exclaimed Margaret,—"but you need not have feared him—he is one of our friends."

"That is just what he said," rejoined the girl; "but he put his arm round my waist, and said my foot was the prettiest in D'Usson—and so I ran away."

Margaret turned away in a rage, at being thus baffled in the object of her inquiry; but a moment's consideration brought her again to the examination of Lisette, who stood in doubt, whether to address her Majesty.

"What still in terror," cried the Queen, "because you were told of the beauty of your feet! Has the garrison mustered this morning?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Lisette, dropping on her knees;—"Pray forgive me! Antoine put all that out of my head!"

"Put what out of your head!" said the Queen, almost frenzied.

"What I saw—and what Monseigneur desired me to tell your Majesty," replied Lisette, frightened at the Queen's anger:—"He has taken every thing prisoner, and is afraid to leave them

till he—till he knows whether the old soldiers will be quiet."

"Rise!" exclaimed the agitated Princess; "let me hear what you know of this!"

Lisette, who had been thrice frightened; first, with the hostilities between the Queen's party and the garrison; secondly, with Antoine, who overtook her in her way to the Queen's chamber; and, lastly, with the apprehension of her Majesty's anger, for not thinking of her message in place of other matters, was not in a condition to relate a succinct narrative of the adventure; but Margaret was enabled, by a series of questions and replies, which we need not detail, to glean the following particulars:—

It was the daily amusement of the female domestics of the fortress to be present at the review of the garrison, to enjoy a laugh among themselves at the old soldiers. Lisette, who happened to be one of this merry company, observed the troops march into the court-yard, where Pomini was waiting to inspect them. After the usual evolutions had been gone through, the seneschal ordered the men to pile their arquebuses — this manœuvre performed, they were marched to the opposite side of the court. Pomini then addressed the garrison, and in the course of

the harangue, informed his brave troops, that since the departure of the governor, the Queen of Navarre had thought it necessary to increase their ranks, and had in consequence armed her own servants.

"You shall see," said Pomini, "what a gallant band they are!"

Hereupon he ordered the drummer to beat his tambour; it was the signal for the entry of Antoine and five confederates, armed with arquebuses and lighted matches, which are, as our readers may know, coils of cord saturated with a mixture of spirits of wine, and other inflammatory agents, and through which process, the cord burns with a slow fire, and may be carried, even in a cap on the head, without danger of the fire being extinguished ere the coil is all consumed. The little battalion took a station opposite the garrison, standing between it and the piled arms. The Baron De Nevailles entered the area alone, as his sense of the ridiculous would not have permitted his marching at the head of the arquebusiers with all the gravity essential to a commandant placed in such critical circumstances. He took his place by the side of Pomini.

The seneschal then informed the wonder-struck troops, that the second and new battalion, were

desirous of placing the affairs of D'Usson on a surer footing; that they were convinced that harmony would never prevail in a fortress where the power, instead of being consolidated in one authority, was shared between chiefs of, perhaps, very opposite opinions on matters of policy. A reform was in consequence much wanted. The second battalion, anxious that peace and subordination should prevail within the rocky limits of D'Usson, and that they should be on good terms with their veteran brethren, had resolved on proclaiming the Queen of Navarre chatelaine of D'Usson, sole commandant of the fortress and garrison; and they invited their comrades to join them in the proclamation.

This harangue, which was delivered by Pomini, in a tone partaking now of fear and now of boldness, was listened to by the garrison with astonishment and alarm. They appeared panic-struck, and looked at each other, and then at the arquebusiers in dismay, till an old veteran suddenly waved his arm, and uttered a shout of *Vive De Cœuvres! Vive le gouverneur*.

The seneschal turned pale: the fear of the governor's vengeance entered his soul, and he looked at De Nevailles for advice; the Baron

whispered a few words, and placing his hand on Pomini's shoulder, gently pushed him forward.

"I had forgot to say, Soldiers!" continued the would-be lord of L'Isle Du Marais, in an abrupt tone, the consequence of his fear, but which sounded like decisiveness, "that the battalion of her Majesty have come to the resolution of shooting every one who utters seditious cries within the precincts of D'Usson. The veteran battalion will, I am sure, agree with their brethren in the necessity of this ordinance; and that the sentence should be put in execution within five minutes from the commission of the offence."

The poor remnant of the governor's troops were quite at a loss what to do; they found themselves deserted by their officer, upon whom they had placed reliance, and thrown defenceless into the breach of danger unarmed. The cry of the old soldier now fell powerless on the ears of men taken by surprise, without arms, and threatened with destruction from the fire of their opponents.

De Nevailles perceiving their irresolution and wavering, and being anxious that the *coup d'etat* should terminate amicably—as an onset might have given men driven to desperation, a chance

of victory after the first charge, which would have left him still twice his own number to contend with had every shot taken effect—stepped forward, and in a calm voice explained the cause of the Queen of Navarre's assumption of the command of the fortress; and that she would continue to hold it till her brother had satisfied her just demands, or ceded its possession as an equivalent, which latter alternative, he had no doubt would be preferred, as money was scarce in the royal treasury.

These, and other persuasive reasons formed the theme of his address, which had for its object, not only the possession of the fortress, but to gain the good opinion of the veterans, by showing them that Margaret had not commenced a violent proceeding without just ground for what she had done and attempted. On the other hand, he explained to them that if they refused to obey the authority of the Queen for the space of one year, till the quarrel with her brother was settled —or to march out of D'Usson instantly without arms, which would be surrendered to them in the valley, as the Queen did not wish to expose brave soldiers to the disasters which might accrue to men in a defenceless state, and in times of great trouble, he and his servants, with the aid of the seneschal,

would not quit the court-yard till one party or the other was completely *hors de combat.*

This speech produced the desired effect, and a negociation immediately took place; which, while pending, De Nevailles espying Lisette, took her aside, and sent her to the Queen of Navarre, desiring her royal presence at the balcony; at the same time he dispatched Antoine to look after Roquelaure, that his reverence should appear with the Queen, and do away with any impression which might exist of Huguenot heresy being mixed up in the change of masters at D'Usson, and this stroke of policy—rather eccentric and fanciful as were many of the Baron's actions—he judged the more necessary, for though Margaret was esteemed a sincere Catholic, and moreover a good friend to the Church, his own name was a fire-brand among the zealous partisans of the olden sect, and might bring the Queen's ulterior motives into suspicion, not only with the troops of De Cœuvres, but even with Pomini and the household.

After a little delay, the Queen of Navarre, accompanied by the colossal cordelier, appeared at the balcony to receive the homage of the united garrison. Her own partisans were enthusiastic in their cries; but the veterans took off their caps, and saluted their future mistress, without, how-

ever, any verbal demonstrations of respect. Margaret, who had been in the mean time joined by De Nevailles, addressed her new adherents, thanking them for their allegiance, and saying that she accepted of their services till the negociation with her brother had terminated.

A large supply of the best provisions the fortress could afford, together with a bag of crowns, distributed among the garrison, completed *la journée d'Usson*, in a manner satisfactory to most concerned.

So quietly had the transfer been effected, that Mademoiselle D'Estrées was ignorant that she was a prisoner in her own pleasant home of many a year. When Margaret and her friends left the balcony, De Nevailles, after congratulating her Majesty on her splendid acquisition, said:—

"We must, as soon as possible, procure recruits to leaven the morality of the veterans, which is very defective; I think it very probable that the presence of the Lady Gabrielle might stir them into rebellion. D'Usson is not our own till the veterans are outnumbered."

"By St. Francis!" said the monk, who had not been made privy to the exploit till summoned to attend Margaret on the balcony;—"what will your royal mother say to this?"

"Her voice will have lost its strength ere its echoes gain the summit of D'Usson," replied the Queen of Navarre; "but there is an immediate task for either you or the Baron to perform. Mademoiselle D'Estrées must meet the difficulties of her changed condition. Who will be the herald?"

"The Baron De Nevailles," cried Roquelaure, who did not relish being an unwelcome messenger, "had better convey the bitter news to her in the words of a minstrel-poet—such as I have heard them reciting to each other: the sweet language of a troubadour will soften the ill flavour of the intelligence."

"Here is profanity!" cried the Baron, who was vexed with the monk's speech, for more reasons than one:—"Are not the consolations of piety and religion meetest for one in captivity? Would you mock the imprisoned bird with the notes of a gay carol? In what holy sanctuary have you been trained, Father, that you dare avow your preference for profane canticles? Aye! and to offer them to a sick heart—the while forgetting your holy office!"

"Heard them reciting to each other!" said Margaret to herself; "and De Nevailles betrays ill temper! I must question Emilie—it was then,

in truth, a quarrel I witnessed. Father!" continued she, no longer leaving the office to their choice, "explain to Mademoiselle D'Estrées the position in which she now stands in D'Usson!"

"I do not know myself rightly," replied the cordelier.

"Then say any thing you like," rejoined the royal chatelaine of D'Usson.

There was no appeal from the decision implied in this remark; so the monk, without more ado, commenced his pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of D'Usson. Gabrielle had not been of late an early riser; not through idleness, as those could aver whose office it was to supply the fuel of her lustres. Midnight oil was consumed undoubtedly; and as the Lady had acquired the reputation of learning, her servants shook their heads, and said, that the fair chatelaine would kill herself with study; that she was already looking very ill.

When Roquelaure sought admittance to her reception-room—one of a suite which overlooked the valley of St. Germain—the lady had just purposed visiting her guests, unconscious that they were now her gaolers.

"You have come to reproach my want of courtesy, father!" said Gabrielle:—"I have woefully forgotten the duties of hospitality, to leave

them to the mercy of the household—but I promise better conduct for the future."

"I wish she had rated me instead of this civility," said Roquelaure to himself; "I should have been better inclined to my ungracious task."

"You do not speak, Father Roquelaure," continued D'Estrées:—"Is her Majesty ill?"

"What shall I say?" continued the monk in his unheard soliloquy; "out with the truth at once, or give note of preparation?—Poor lady!"

He decided on the latter mode, saying in a sorrowful tone—which at first drew a smile from Gabrielle, who could not help being struck with the incongruity of a lugubrious sentiment from such a tall, well-fed, and joyous-looking column of humanity—"Daughter! the rich and the poor are both alike subject to misfortunes! No destiny, however noble and ancient, is above their reach—even the princely Valois is a fugitive from his home!"

"It is as I feared," cried D'Estrées, in alarm; "the Queen has been taken ill. You shake your head;—I hope she is not very ill."

"Not worse than either of us," replied Roquelaure; "my coming concerns yourself, daughter!"

"Ah! then the Marquis has been taken prisoner—or perhaps he has met with a cruel fate—

you are unkind to mock me with this suspense. I will know—and you shall see that I can bear my loss. Speak on, father !"

And Gabrielle, who was indignant at the circumlocution of the monk, triumphed over her fears, and eyed the cordelier with such firmness, that he took courage, and related the events of the morning.

D'Estrées heard the narrative in silence, and when the monk ceased speaking, he watched her countenance till he beheld a gleam of light flash across her features.

"Ah ! by my injured father !" exclaimed Gabrielle, "we shall be avenged ! The train was prepared by a just decree in anticipation—no longer do I feel remorse !"

"Revenge, daughter, is a most unchristian feeling," murmured the cordelier.

"It is, father," replied Gabrielle, in a subdued tone ; "and were you my confessor, it would fall to your office to impose a heavy penance on me ; but I imagine the confessor of the Queen of Navarre will be saved such an unwelcome duty towards his royal penitent. I am, indeed, a poor mortal, and cannot feel either hatred or revenge without becoming criminal in the eyes of your reverence ; but her Majesty—as you have just

narrated to me—can hate her family, cheat them of their possessions, violate the laws of hospitality, and conduct herself, on the face of God's earth, as though all were her own, and morality an emanation of her own will, to be put aside at pleasure.—Yes! she can do all this, and receive the commendation of her confessor! Truly do they call her a divinity at Paris, since she is not subject to the penalties which fall on the heads of mortal women.—Nay, father—not one word of remonstrance! Only tell me this—am I to quit D'Usson before the Marquis can know of my departure?"

"You do the Queen of Navarre and myself much wrong," exclaimed the confessor, writhing beneath the lash of the fair D'Estrées: "I knew not of her intent till success had crowned the attempt; and her Majesty wishes only to place herself in a position where she can command justice. She has been a suitor—yes, a beggar—for that boon, too long."

"Then were I Queen of Navarre, or her secretary and councillor—he whom you now call Baron de Nevailles," cried Gabrielle with animation,—"I would not so have committed my good faith! Would it not have been worthier of a Valois, or even of a De Nevailles, whose name I have read of in old chronicles, to have summoned friends

and adherents, beleaguered a castle in the open day, before God and man, and carried it by force of arms, in every way worthy of their ancestry! Are they not ashamed to show their faces? Will they dare meet my father—talk to him, the Baron, with his visor up—or will he only survey his kind host through bars of steel? Why you, father, seem ashamed of your part."

"Daughter!" cried the humbled cordelier, "the church and state are both obliged to act at seasons through expediency rather than doctrine. The ways of truth are straight, but obstacles are often thrown in its paths by the malicious, forcing the well-disposed into a crooked course. Look at the forked lightning launched from Heaven's hand! Is the hand crooked? Is it not rather the resistance—the evil in its path which it has to overcome—which forces it into an angular line? Look at the gentle spray, which grows under the care of the fair chatelaine in the garden of D'Usson—so near to Heaven! Hold it forth in your hand—look at the ends—how parallel! But the length between—how angular! a succession of crooked lines, like the forked play of the lightning! Here is but a type of human nature. You see the original design—the fair straight course of nature thwarted by evil, unseen but in its effects—you

witness the result of the struggle—a perpetual effort towards a straight career, and a continual involuntary divergence, producing the crooked spray! Such is poor human nature: and such it will be, till He, whom I serve, and who permits its sway, as a touchstone for the strength and beauty of his own creation, shall, when this dispensation is accomplished, will it from off the earth. But till then, the struggle between good and evil will continue, and the human victim gasp out its respective colours, unceasingly conflicting, as the dying dolphin makes the waves reflect in turn every colour of the rainbow."

"O confessor! worthy of the Queen of Navarre!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "Then evil is beautiful."

"Nay, daughter," replied the monk quickly; "but in this our mortal state it calls forth the hidden virtue of humanity. Had nothing but goodness and philanthropy reigned on the face of the earth, where could have been displayed the holy offices of charity? Where the divine offices, which the lowly and good of heart of your sex displayed toward their Redeemer? Where his bright example—a lamp to the end of the world—and a glory for ever, but for the persecution of his cruel enemies? Had mankind never been afflicted,

they would never have known their strength—had they never witnessed and never done wrong, their devotion would have lacked the depth of feeling which springs from a heart which has escaped perdition!"

"And you, father, looked like a guilty creature, when you came here on your errand," said Gabrielle, whose anger had subsided beneath admiration of the enthusiasm which she had kindled in the monk.

"I have ever been a child seeking repentance, and help to escape from a world to which I am chained!" replied the admirer of fattened capons, and apologist of expediency.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The plot is laid: if all things fall out right,
I shall as famous be by this exploit
As Scythian Thomyris by Cyrus' death.

HENRY VI.

To the spectator from the valley, D'Usson with its grey towers reflecting the sun's beams, and its lofty basement rock, the centre of a panorama of romantic beauty, seemed the sure abode of happiness; but far from happy was the condition of the inmates. Gabrielle would not quit her chamber, lest it might be construed into a recognition of the Queen's authority; she was resolute in holding herself as a captive, scorning, as she did, to be the guest of the arch-traitress of Navarre.

The victors did not feel themselves secure in their new possession till the temper of the garrison had been put to the proof against the old governor, whose return was daily expected; nor was it prudent for either De Nevailles or Pomini to leave the fortress in order to levy reinforcements,

as the number of the Queen's party was so small, that each of her friends might fairly account himself essential to her safety.

In this state of uncertainty and alarm, affairs remained at D'Usson till the trumpet of the Marquis announced his arrival in the valley; never was heard a more fearful sound, though pealing in the ears of veterans, and also, of one who had done good service in the army of his sovereign.

Half-way down the descent was a ruined tower which had in the feudal era served as a defence to the winding path, and without the capture of which, the gates of the castle were inapproachable to foes. It had been dismantled since the erection of the batteries which flanked the gate-tower, as a useless position. The thought flashed across the mind of the Baron, that from this post three or four determined arquebusiers might keep at bay the whole force of the Marquis; and what was of more importance, prevent him having the least communication with his former garrison. But on the other hand he dreaded a counter-revolution; to the practised eyes of the veterans, his absence would have presented a favourable opportunity of shutting him out, and so making their peace with De Cœuvres. The possibility of such an error

was not to be endured, and he made up his mind to stay within the walls, and allow the unsuspicious old noble to approach.

De Cœuvres was in excellent temper; the accounts of the steward and the produce of his lands were both very gratifying; his soldiers had proved themselves willing assistants — and the double journey had been performed without encountering the troops of either of the adverse factions. The old Marquis longed to renew his homage to the fair Navarrese Queen, and again to sun himself in her smiles—an agreeable contrast to the scorching rays of Phœbus; but this pleasure was denied him.

"La Roche," exclaimed he, "addressing the veteran, as the little band was toiling up the ascent; "the seneschal is too proud to come forth to greet us; and methinks, the Queen of Navarre might have shown herself on the terrace—it would have made our welcome doubly pleasant."

La Roche did not reply; but when after rounding a mass of rock, they came within view of the gates, and saw the portcullis lowered as though the fortress were in a state of siege, the old arquebusier uttered one long, deep—*Sacre!*

"By St. Michael! how is this?" exclaimed De

Cœuvres; "that villain seneschal has been playing us some trick on purpose to amuse her Majesty. He shall quit D'Usson ere sunset."

The Marquis ordered his trumpeter to sound a parley; the rocks and valleys echoed the warlike notes, which, however, brought no friendly greeting from the castle; a sentinel threw from the gate-tower a packet, which Robert rushed forward to pick up. It was a declaration of the Queen of Navarre, setting forth her unsatisfied claims, and her determination to hold D'Usson till her demands were complied with, either by the King of France or her royal Mother; it concluded with a regret for the show of hostilities displayed towards the Marquis, but that whatever might be the good feelings entertained towards him as a French gentleman, yet as an officer of his Majesty, he could not, on any consideration, be permitted to enter the fortress.

"Do I dream?" exclaimed De Cœuvres, when he had finished the perusal of the document; "No! No! It is a conceit of the Queen's secretary, in conjunction with that villain Pomini, to have a laugh against me!"

The Marquis, however, upon looking a second time at the declaration, which was worded with all the accuracy of diplomatic care, shook his head.

He feared he had been outwitted, but resolved to make another trial. A second parley was sounded; and Pomini made his appearance behind the portcullis, much afraid of his master's arquebusiers, whom, in his just rage, he might order to fire upon the unfortunate seneschal. As soon as De Cœuvres perceived his treacherous subaltern sheltered behind the iron-bars, like a prisoner in a cage, his mind again recurred to the idea of a meditated frolic.

Commanding the astonished soldiers to halt, he rode up to the gates; Pomini, though on the safe side, recoiled half a step in fear at his approach.

"When your game is over, Monsieur Jongleur," cried the Marquis, suppressing his rage, "you will, I hope, allow our tired bodies a place of repose. This is the cleverest piece of pastime you have achieved since I took you into D'Usson. Have you no fear that we should catch up your wild spirit, and throw in a score of balls to show our sympathy?"

The calmness with which De Cœuvres uttered this speech was the result of a strong effort to conceal his vexation; but he was in that dubious state of mind, in which a man finds it so difficult to act with the right feeling, not knowing whether he be made the subject of a joke or a piece of

treachery, and unwilling that he should commit himself in the event of either alternative.

"As to fear, Monseigneur!" replied Pomini, watching the eyes of the Marquis, which were earnestly scanning the interior of the court, to ascertain who might be within hearing, "that ought to be mutual. The old culverins on the batteries are loaded with shot—and we might have tumbled Monseigneur into the valley ere he could speak to us."

"Loaded with shot!—Shot for a salute!" exclaimed the Marquis, in a voice faltering with apprehension.

"Shot for a salute! *Pardieu!* Monseigneur! No! we have not changed the old customs at D'Usson!" rejoined the seneschal.

"Old customs! What and when mean you?" asked De Cœuvres, brooding a flood of revenge.

"I mean when Monseigneur was governor of D'Usson!" replied Pomini.

"By the host of hell! you infernal thief!" shouted De Cœuvres grasping the portcullis with such violence as to shake the massive iron, "have I been feeding a viper— a reptile?"

"A viper—a reptile!" echoed the seneschal, indignant at these appellatives, and little pleased at the slight titter which he heard from some one

listening:—"When we meet again, I must be satisfied on that point."

"Have you let in the King of Navarre—you base, traitorous wretch? Let me hear the worst at once, that I may avoid what I loathe the sight of? Where is the lady Gabrielle? I will not give up D'Usson till its walls are as low as the rock on which it stands! The King shall aid me—Satan shall give me power over his own—you devil-ridden scoundrel!" cried the Marquis, in his impotent rage, as he grasped the bars of the portcullis.

The seneschal, full of remorse for his treachery, narrated a history of the transaction, in which he attempted to exculpate himself from all blame, save what attached to his frailty in being induced to listen to the syren-persuasions of the Queen of Navarre, who, as he represented De Cœuvres, had used her most cunning wiles to gain his acquiescence: and to her arts, he said, he had fallen a victim.

To have heard this confession of Pomini, one would have imagined him the most injured of men; a mortal who had fallen into the snare of an immortal enchantress;—a Circe from whom there was no escape! The Marquis himself blushed; for he remembered his own infatuation,

and trembled at the idea of the disloyal temptation to which he had been exposed.

The low voice in which the seneschal uttered the detail of his backslidings was believed by the Marquis to arise from a consciousness of shame; but in reality it was to conceal the colouring of his narrative from those who he knew were listening to the conference.

"You can undo your crime, Pomini!" said De Cœuvres, still hanging to the portcullis in the act of listening to the seneschal.

"I dare not—I am at this moment watched—the Queen's secretary has twice threatened to hang me on the terrace, against your return, for pitying Mademoiselle! They dread me as one would a pestilence," replied the plausible functionary.

"The meet reward of villany!" exclaimed the old governor.—"And my poor Gabrielle! a prisoner at D'Usson! I thank God, she will not even speak to the traitorous syren!"

A few moments' reflection pointed out the only course the Marquis could pursue; he bade the seneschal bear his protest against the treachery, and to inform Gabrielle that he should demand her on the morrow—and immediately left the gate-tower and joined his soldiers.

"Jean La Roche! and you, my brave friends!"

cried he; "there has been foul treason at work—we must seek another home till I have matured my plans. I promise you, we shall not have many hours pass over our heads ere we regain our own fortress. The garrison is not stronger than when we quitted it; and your comrades do duty through threats of instant death! Nay, resistance is useless now—we must submit to our fate, and call in subtlety to our aid against those lofty towers."

The Marquis had much difficulty in persuading his men to submit to the loss of their citadel; but he at length induced them to retire, upon his promise of leading them to the attack at a point where art might successfully compete with strength.

"Gabrielle never leaves her chamber," said De Cœuvres to himself; "I would have sent for her to the gate, but others besides Pomini were within hearing."

The discomfited old noble returned to the valley, meditating a speedy revenge on his treacherous guests. It had given him great pleasure to hear that Gabrielle never quitted her ward of the castle, as it instantly struck him that a passage was still open to his entry.

On the side of the rock nearest to the valley of St. Germain *sous* d'Usson, over whose extent, bounded by the river Allier, the windows of his

daughter's chamber overlooked, old tradition had reported an ascent to the castle practicable; and in truth, an escape by this means had been effected a century and a half previous, when D'Usson was a royal prison; and for which the governor had been dismissed, as it was more than suspected he had permitted his charge to lower himself from a window of the fortress after the garrison had retired to rest; trusting that, as no trace of the exit of the prisoner was discoverable, no blame could attach to himself.

But Louis was too crafty himself to be cheated by his servants, and caused a strict investigation to be made; the result of which was, the disgrace of the governor. Gabrielle, in searching through the archives of the royal chateau in quest of the venerable tomes of legendary tales and poetry, in which she so much delighted, accidentally discovered a plan of the retreat of the prisoner, which had been drawn up by Louis's commissioner from the confession of the culprit, who obtained a remission, by that course, of the severe punishment which the monarch had threatened him with for his contumacious silence. But little interest would have been attached to this document, had she not found that the room adjoining her sleeping chamber was lighted by the identical window out of which

the former governor had lowered his friend to the rocks beneath.

She presented the plan to the Marquis, who had curiosity enough—there might be a spice of caution in his resolve—to leave the fortress at night, and take the chart with him to the *Bois de Rigaud*, a wood at the foot of D'Usson, skirted by the little stream which encircled the rocky eminence. From this point he was enabled to trace, in a reverse direction, the track of the prisoner among the clefts and fissures of the mountain, till he arrived beneath the windows of Gabrielle's chamber, and within call of the sentinel. But the lofty wall of stone, which arose in its massive strength from his feet, throwing into dark shade that portion of the mountain on which he stood, bade defiance to any hostile power not favoured by the inmates; and the old noble, after a cautious survey, returned by the same route, at the imminent peril of his limbs.

Though De Cœuvres kept his adventure secret from the garrison, yet he thought it worthy of mention in his next despatch to the secretary Villeroi, as an interesting historical fact, if nothing more; and the secretary, who happened at that season to be free from the alarm of a Huguenotic rebellion, after searching the archives of his office, wrote an answer to the Marquis, stating that he

had found a counterpart or copy of the plan, together with the examination of the delinquent. Thus ended the affair.

But now that De Cœuvres found himself so unexpectedly cheated of his commandancy, his thoughts reverted to the secret pass, and he instantly made up his mind to the attempt, of which we are about to relate the issue. So impressed was he with a certainty of success, that he was afraid to communicate with Gabrielle, lest suspicion should attach to the meeting, and her movements be in consequence closely watched.

He relied only on her being in her own chamber; on this was built all his hopes; and of her close, though voluntary confinement there, Pomini had acquainted him. Scaling ladders he had none —and Issoire was too far off, and besides, on the wrong side of the Allier—and he doubted also of the possibility of conveying such a machine to the foot of the tower. A few pebbles thrown skilfully against the window, would, he was certain, bring the apparition of his daughter to his wistful eyes; or in case of failure of this stratagem, a long ash sapling would reach the projection of the window—and Gabrielle, once aware of the quality of those below, it were hard if she could not find cord, or other material, wherewith a robust

veteran, like Jean la Roche, or sturdy youth, like the more supple Robert, could climb up to the fortunate inlet.

Upon the Marquis detailing his plan to the faithful old veteran, Jean was very angry that his master had omitted what he considered the chief point of the stratagem, which was to acquaint Gabrielle of his intentions.

"Say no more about it—it is now too late," replied De Cœuvres; "I loathed the sight of that tinker's son of Avignon, and was glad to escape."

"It is a wild scheme, by our Lady," said the knowing and presuming La Roche, "but not too much for a soldier to accomplish. But why does Monseigneur trust to the Lady Gabrielle having what the hangman of Montfaucon only never goes without? By St. Genevieve! let us be prepared with a knotted rope or a cord ladder, we might have one to our hands, good enough for a Barbary pirate, by nightfall!"

"You are a clever fellow, Jean!" cried the Marquis, "and shall have that villain's post."

"I say not a word of his dishonesty," thought the veteran; "but Marshal de Biron would have turned up his nose at such a coxcomb."

The night was favourable to their enterprise, which was of a character more toilsome and un-

certain of success, depending on a slight contingency, than dangerous to a band of resolute soldiers. As they emerged from the *Bois de Rigaud*, their beacon-star was blazing; from the western side of D'Usson, the light streaming from the chamber of Gabrielle, might be seen by the peasant as he retired to rest, mayhap to dream of the lovely chatelaine of D'Usson, and, by the magic of sleep, fancy himself transformed into a lord, worthy of her love. The Marquis had not forgotten the route, though the few years which intervened had rendered him less capable of the toil; but the spirit of just revenge which excited his frame, renewed his youthful strength to a degree which surprised those who had hitherto regarded their commander as an old worn-out court favourite, destitute of the leading characteristics of a soldier.

De Cœuvres relied upon his memory in tracing out the intricate pass among the rocks; but it was rather by the distant landmarks to be kept in view, than by looking at the path beneath his feet, that he expected to reach the summit. The fortress with its unconscious beacon-light, was soon lost as they wound round the masses of basaltic columns, which the elements, or the more violent convulsions of nature, had laid bare to the view of the spectator,

who dreaded the fall of the loosened and broken shafts above his head, and which clung only with a lateral support to the descending piles.

At the termination of this ridge, the memory of the old noble served him faithfully in directing his steps due north, himself and his followers scrambling along the steep sides of the mountain. He remembered distinctly, that after keeping this track a short distance—and that he was in the right course he felt certain from being opposite to the peak of a distant hill—he was to descend towards the valley—and again keep a northward track, till he arrived at a ravine, and after passing its defile or mouth, to ascend the opposite steep, with an upward course, till he arrived at the summit.

This was the sum of the treasured burthen of his memory, but he unfortunately forgot that a little water track, which ran over a stony channel down the back of the mountain, ought to have been his guide downward. This he stepped over without notice, keeping an even and straight course till he unexpectedly arrived at the edge of the ravine.

"La Roche," said the Marquis, whispering to the veteran;—"I have lost the path—we must go back—may Heaven, which abhors treachery, point out the true road!"

"Marshal De Biron never marched back if he

had made an awkward movement," replied Jean, "he always cut through the difficulty."

Jean, who dictated to the Marquis in his military office, as much as Pomini had presumed on his indolence in the internal economy of the castle, without waiting for orders, commanded his comrades to halt. De Cœuvres and his deputy were on the brink of the ravine, while at intervals in the rear stood the arquebusiers, in the loose order of march, each with his arquebuse slung behind his back, and with rest in hand, which helped him at need as a staff to grope out the way.

"Comrades! look to your matches!" cried the veteran, addressing the men;—"let us have no mistake. Now Monseigneur!" continued La Roche, in a whisper to the Marquis, "did you not cross this ravine?"

"By St. Michael! No! I recollect looking up its dark defile in my former track," replied De Cœuvres.

"And which path did you trace after you had passed it?" asked the old soldier.

"Along the steep to the summit!" replied the Marquis, his eye fixed on the opposite ascent.

"Bravo! Monseigneur! you have improved upon the engineer—this is a shorter cut!" rejoined La Roche.

"So it might be," said the Marquis, doubtingly; "but how are we to descend? The moon affords light enough to show me that the cliff overhangs—and we must take a leap in the air, if we prefer this route!"

This was an obstacle which La Roche felt convinced would have puzzled even Marshal De Biron; but Jean, nowise daunted, and like other professors, desirous of exhibiting his skill to an illustrious pupil, got down upon his knees, and crawled to the edge of the precipice, and to his great delight espied, at a short distance below, a ledge of rock. The veteran without more ado, arose, and calling out for his friend Robert to approach, pointed out the projecting shelf, and requested the young soldier to make the descent without delay, and there to await, and assist his less active comrades.

Robert without hesitation accepted the challenge, not knowing but that it was the route marked out by the chief. The stronger end of the ashen-pole, which they had brought with them, was held by two of the soldiers even with the rock, and projecting beyond it several feet; Robert advanced boldly to the edge, and clinging with both hands to the ash, drew over his body; finding his feet touch the sides, he let go his hold, and slid down till stopped by the ledge. The first step of difficulty over, the

remainder of the band followed his example, leaving the Marquis and La Roche behind.

Now, Monseigneur," said the veteran, "it is your turn; and when you reach the bottom, I shall drop the end of the pole, and slide down—but do not forget to hold tightly below!"

The old noble having undertaken the expedition, was determined to proceed with it at any risk; and complied with the request of La Roche, who receiving assurance of the governor's safety, followed his own prescribed method; but the wood being slender at the top, broke with the weight of his body, and he fell among his comrades, crushing Robert who was holding the pole. Both rolled off the ledge together, ere their friends could prevent it, who were doomed to witness the distressing spectacle. If it had not been for the penalty of the fall, the descent of the two arquebusiers would have excited the mirth of their comrades; for the arquebuse of Jean, the foremost body, catching in the broken *debris* of the mountain, hindered, for a moment, his downward progress, but Robert, who moved like a cylinder, rolled over his friend, and took the lead; while La Roche being dislodged by the shock, renewed his course in the wake of the recruit, till both were out of sight of the trembling Marquis.

"There falls the best of soldiers," cried he in despair;—"I shall never see his fellow."

"What, not a friend go in search of him," exclaimed one of the band:—"by St. Gregory, I'll find his body, if I have to roll myself."

And so saying, the soldier commenced his awkward march, sliding and moving sideways alternately, as best suited the nature of the descent. The Marquis and his troops followed the intrepid arquebusier. When they had nearly gained the bottom of the ravine, they heard to their astonishment the voice of the last veteran, crying out—

"Have you brought the broken ash with you?"

"Curse the ash," cried the foremost soldier, "we came in search of you."

To the inquiries of his delighted commander, La Roche explained that both himself and Robert had been saved by the loose texture of the *debris*, giving way beneath their bodies, which escaped with only a few bruises.

The opposite side of the ravine presented a work of toil, but of toil only, and they gained the broad back of the mountains without further danger. The castle was now often in view, and encouraged by the light which shone brightly

from the chamber of Gabrielle, the Marquis and his band of adventurous soldiers assured themselves of success. But a new danger presented itself; they might possibly be seen by the sentinels, an event which would have destroyed all their hopes, and made useless all their labour. The idea of this fatal termination of the perilous march delayed their progress exceedingly; they used the utmost caution to hinder, as much as possible, the noise of their footsteps and the rattling of arms; but perseverance, at length, brought them, scathless and unseen, beneath the walls of the fortress.

The western side of D'Usson was in deep shadow, the moon being in the opposite quarter of the heavens; and beneath the walls of the castle the little band rested in darkness and safety. The Marquis was in no mood to be interested by the lovely western hemisphere of mountain, stream, and valley, lit up with the smiling radiance of the lamp of night; sterner thoughts possessed his soul as he listened to the upbraidings of Jean La Roche for omitting to bring with him the ash-shaft.

"Even two feet short of its length," said the veteran, "it would have been as useful as Jacob's ladder to us."

"It cannot be helped," replied De Cœuvres, looking up at his daughter's window, "we must— but gracious heavens! what do I see? a ladder of rope! Has Gabrielle had a dream?—A miracle; —our wants anticipated."

Whether a miracle, or an effort of human agency, both the Marquis and La Roche distinctly saw a ladder of rope hanging from the window to the ground. It was no vision, for they ran forward, and grasped it as palpably to their senses, as any rope ever touched by human hands.

"By the holy Virgin," said Robert to himself, "this puts me in mind of the noise which I heard at night when on duty."

De Cœuvres trembled with an unknown cause of fear.

"Do you ascend Jean," cried he, "I am powerless—we are betrayed."

"And that roll down the cliff has made me so giddy and light-headed, that I scarce know what I do except with a strong effort," replied La Roche;—"I would rather some one else made the attempt."

"Nay, Jean, I command you!" said the trembling noble, who was unwilling that any one but his most confidential subordinate should encounter the task.

The arquebusier was too good a disciplinarian to dream even of disobeying his orders; he took out his slow match, and affixing it to the lock of the arquebuse, which he again slung across his back, put foot on the ladder, and commenced the ascent. Step by step the veteran mounted till he was enabled to peer in at the open window. To his great astonishment, he saw, or thought he saw, for he was not certain what influence the severe fall had had on his senses, Gabrielle seated by the side of a man in a rustic dress, but of noble features.

"There is no danger, Gabrielle," exclaimed the peasant in a voice full of tenderness. "I wish there were—I would that the road to your lofty tower were beset with all the cooped up garrison of D'Usson. I have been so accustomed to gain delight through difficulties, that my happiness seems won too lightly."

"Umph!" muttered La Roche to himself, "then you did not cross the ravine."

"That a simple evening walk in Auvergne," continued the rustic gallant looking upon her downcast face, and adjusting a string of pearls which had fallen over her brow, "should restore to my unworthy eyes such perfection!—Repeat again, Gabrielle, that you were pleased to see

me—a lover never feels secure—he requires again and again that his mistress should assure him of his blissful destiny."

"By St. Genevieve!" said the bewildered arquebusier to himself, as he surveyed the scene—his head just peeping above the ledge of the window, "I envy the fellow! to call the mountain path a simple evening walk."

"You are so suspicious that I shall be angry with you," said the beautiful girl raising her eyes; "can I give a stronger proof, than my courage in venturing to see you?—words are poor after this."

"And yet words, even angry words, from a sweet mouth, are rich and beautiful as precious gems," replied the peasant. "In passion, they are diamonds, brilliant and flashing—but in the divine mood of my Gabrielle, they come from out the sweet casket of her mouth, soft as pearls, reflecting a subdued and tender light, like her own love."

"Ah, I hear the Marquis calling below," thought La Roche;—"ought I to speak to the lady or not?"

"I have good news, Gabrielle, which confirms what I before only glanced at," continued the peasant lover, "as a remote event, not to be accomplished in a day. But my friends at Rome

have written to me to say, that his Holiness is well disposed to my suit—perhaps out of revenge to my enemies, whom, as you know, are at enmity with him. Our union, may not be far distant."

"Mademoiselle," cried the asquebusier, who found it necessary either to return and explain what he had seen to the impatient Marquis, or address the lady; and as the object of the enterprise was uppermost in his thoughts, he chose the latter alternative.

The surprise of the lovers, whether real or but imaginary beings, may easily be conceived at this sudden interruption. The peasant was in a mighty rage, and drawing a concealed weapon, rushed forward to revenge himself on the intruder, who despite his bruises and his giddiness, knew the point of safety, and glided down the ladder as cleverly as a Levant-skipper.

"You villain, what is the matter?" cried the excited Marquis, collaring the veteran.

"Pardon me, Monseigneur," exclaimed La Roche, dragging De Cœuvres aside, and relating to him in a low hurried tone of voice what he had seen and heard.

"It is a lie," shouted the old noble;—"your fall has made you delirious."

"Then look for yourself," replied the offended arquebusier.

"I will!" retorted the governor, "and let you and your comrades follow me closely. D'Usson shall be ours in a few minutes."

Up sprung the enraged noble, and scrambling in at the window, he found himself in the presence of his daughter, who was sitting alone, and reading one of her favourite poets.

"Gabrielle," cried De Cœuvres, and they rushed into each other's arms.

La Roche, who followed close, both to vindicate his assertion, and to stand prepared for the contest with the garrison, dropped into the chamber.

"You liar," cried the Marquis, looking at him reproachfully;—"are you not convinced of your falsehoods?"

"Then ask Mademoiselle why this ladder hung here," replied the stubborn arquebusier.

"Who was your visitor, Gabrielle?" asked the Marquis with a smile.

"Visitor?" cried the lady returning his smile, "I was not so honoured! the Queen threatened me with a visit to-morrow morning, ere you came to demand me—and to avoid her loathed presenee, for I am sure, I should be committed to the

dungeons if I encountered her, I resolved to escape by the same route as the chevalier."

During this colloquy, several of the governor's soldiers had entered the chamber to the astonishment of its mistress; but ere she had time to ask her father the precise nature of his intentions, and which she only guessed at, an unlucky incident occurred, which threatened the safety of all.

Lisette, who happened to be passing through the corridor, was alarmed at the noise in the chamber of the lady Gabrielle, and listening for a few moments, heard the epithet of liar, uttered in an angry voice, accompanied with a motion of the feet, and other indications of violence, either threatened or offered.

Away ran the girl to De Nevailles with a story that a band of robbers were murdering Mademoiselle in her chamber. The Baron after commanding her to raise an alarm, ran hastily to D'Estrée's quarter of the castle, and throwing open the door of her chamber, found himself in the company of the lady, and some six or more of the supposed robbers. His attention being first attracted to Gabrielle, he did not scan closely the quality of her visiters.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed he, addressing her;

I have come in time for the safety of Mademoiselle!"

"Thank the powers of hell," cried the Marquis, in the bitterness of despair, "that have wrought against a good cause."

"The Marquis De Cœuvres!" exclaimed De Nevailles, stepping back in surprise.

"Ah! The governor! you traitor!" cried Jean La Roche, springing upon the Baron so suddenly that they both rolled to the floor together.

But the veteran's good intentions were foiled by the arrival of the household. A rapid fight ensued, while the Baron and La Roche lay struggling with each other in the midst of the skirmish, suffering more from the feet of the combatants, both of friends and enemies, than either foe from the grasp of his antagonist.

The battle would undoubtedly have terminated in favour of De Cœuvres, whose reinforcements were continually dropping in, had not De Nevailles as he lay on the floor, perceived their mode of ingress. Letting go his hold of the veteran, he grasped the leg of one of the Queen's servants, and was about to receive a cut in return, when his face was recognised by Antoine, who had just en-

tered the scene of action, and interposed between the blind rage of the domestic.

"Never mind me and this old bull-dog," cried the Baron; "cut off the supplies which are coming in at the window. I'll choke him yet."

Antoine, who had performed gentle deeds at Coutras, was calm enough to perceive the bubbling stream of human life which poured in its tide to the assistance of the elder dynasty of D'Usson; and without more ado, he ran to the darkened window, and cleared away the incumbrance, by a single thrust between the cuirass and skull-cup of an arquebusier, who fell backward with a perforated throat. But the hydra of life was many-headed—this vitality, however, did not escape the quick eye of Antoine—and placing his sharp weapon between the ropes and the window-sill, he turned it edgeways, with the skill of an Atropos—and the crash among the rocks consummated the destiny of more than one of the adventurers.

Meanwhile, the domestic of the Queen, who in his hurry had been about to commit an irreparable error, repaired the fault by disengaging La Roche from his hold—and this was no easy task, unless the gordian knot of life had been untied, which the Baron would not permit. The entry of the garrison terminated the contest, leaving the Mar-

quis, La Roche, and his followers, save two who had slipped off cunningly elsewhere, each without his human mask, which wore a death-like grin, a parting expressive of escape—prisoners to her Majesty, the Queen of Navarre and its annexed principalities, by divine grace, and chatelaine of D'Usson, *par la sagesse humaine.*

"Fortune has not looked kindly on your attempt, Monseigneur," said De Nevailles to the Marquis. "You were, as the seneschal informed me, coming to D'Usson to receive Mademoiselle. I cannot offer you the hospitalities of the chateau, for such I am sure you would spurn—neither can my presence be so welcome as before we parted. I will, therefore, leave you and your friends to the care of Antoine and the household, who will supply whatever your condition may require!"

Saying these words, the Baron De Nevailles bowed to the Marquis and his fair daughter, and left the chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Si en quelque séjour,
Soit en bois ou en prée,
Soit pour l'aube de jour,
Ou soit pour la vesprée,
Sans cesse mon cœur sent
Le regret d'un absent.

MARIE STUART.

On the following morn, De Cœuvres, with his fair daughter, and their retinue, bade adieu to D'Usson.

The Queen of Navarre was now in possession of a fortress, which, saving the action of internal treachery, might bid defiance to the best appointed army which the age could bring into the field. But he, who had been the chief instrument in its acquisition, was the most unhappy of the inmates. The just resentment which Emilie had conceived at the supposed infidelity of De Nevailles, was not of that transient nature, which might be dissipated by a few words of repentance; it had been suffered to sink daily deeper into her spirit, till it alarmed and recalled the wandering lover to his duty—but

only to receive a renewal of the reproaches which Margaret had heretofore interrupted.

Nor could subsequent contrition efface the impression which his estrangement had caused;—the feelings of the youthful Emilie had been deeply wounded—she had zealously and tenderly hoarded up a treasure which had proved worthless. Deeds were not to be expiated by words in the heart of the *protegée* of the Queen of Navarre; her quick, though hitherto subdued and silent spirit, demanded a more convincing and atoning proof of repentance.

The Baron, in this dilemma, scorned to appeal to Margaret, who was ignorant of the quarrel, or even of the grief which her fair charge could not always conceal, when the pride which sustained her in the presence of De Nevailles, forsook her in his absence. Margaret had, hitherto, had but one idea, and eyes only for what related to it; Emilie was unnoticed by her protectress, though every action of the latter had its origin in her welfare.

In addition to the loss of her love, De Nevailles had the mortification of perceiving that his share in the seizure of the fortress was severely blamed by Emilie as a dereliction of the honour of a gentleman, and as unworthy of his station.

"When the Marquis De Cœuvres lays his complaint before the King," said the lady, in reply to the pleading of the Baron, "all France will condemn your conduct as a piece of treachery, not even redeemed by an act of valour."

"Why not add, in the same schooling spirit," retorted De Nevailles, stung with the charge, "that it was the loss of my faith towards yourself, that brought about the loss of my honour?"

"I cannot complain of your forsaking one who has not even a name which she durst avow," replied Emilie, calmly; "but I dare suspect those declarations which have been proved insincere."

"May I not listen to a song from the mouth of any lady save yourself?" cried the Baron, whose proud spirit, vexed that the influence which had made the friendship and gained the confidence of two Queens, should be lost upon a simple girl, was waxing wroth.

The lady did not reply.

"Has the Queen of Navarre," continued De Nevailles, "become so anxious to free herself from obligation as to require Mademoiselle to impugn the character of her Majesty's adviser and friend? If the violent assumption of this stronghold were so wide a departure from honourable

action, will not discredit attach itself to the Queen as well as her servant?"

"The Baron De Nevailles is not of the same faith as the Queen of Navarre," replied Emilie, "and his attaching himself to her service, of itself will be deemed a desertion of his own party. To league with our priesthood, in an act of so ambiguous a nature as the seizure of a chateau where he had been hospitably entertained, cannot elevate the character of Monseigneur in the eyes of either his Huguenot brethren, or of those of my own faith. Her Majesty has motives in extenuation, which he cannot plead;—what would be only retaliation in the Queen of Navarre, may be accounted treachery in the Baron De Nevailles!"

"Well! Emilie! you have been, as I wished, a mirror in which I might see the reflection of my own actions. The pure transparent brede is stained with the image of a monster, if, indeed, the mirror reflect truly; and which I must hasten to dissipate. It never was my custom to endeavour to colour my actions with the fleeting hues of rhetoric;—good or bad, they must be judged of in an unbiassed heart, for I scorn appeal!"

"I wish all hearts were biassed towards you as mine is, that you may not be judged of too

harshly," replied Emilie; "yet I fear, my own partial verdict not being free from censure, your name will be breathed with disparaging freedom!"

"A just notion!" said the Baron, smiling;—"Yes! What a wretch I must be! When Condé hears of this seizure, she will compose a ballet to be named *De Nevailles at D'Usson.* It is the proper effort of the artist, when treachery and vice abound, to have one redeeming fount of humanity—one character free from stain, that his own ubiquitary nature may not unjustly be supposed to sympathize with disorder;—and that vice may appear more hideous by contrast. Such is Emilie at D'Usson! But who can the deeply-skilled Condé procure to embody this personification of virtue? Our friends of the Louvre are so much inclined the other way, that the Princess must issue a proclamation to command the indispensable appearance of the fair lady herself, for none but Emilie can be her representative!"

"Adieu! Monseigneur!" said the *protegée* of Margaret; "I promised to wait on her Majesty this morning."

"Pardon my wandering," exclaimed De Nevailles, detaining her; "will no repentance convince you that my heart has never forsaken its

early hopes? Has language no form for one deeply repentant, and——"

"If words could efface the impressions of actions, no one is a greater master of the language than the Baron De Nevailles," said Emilie, interrupting him; "but such ought not to be their power—for your own sake it ought not to be so!" Saying this, the lady disengaged herself, and left the presence of the Baron, who remained motionless awhile.

"Well! well!" exclaimed he, after a pause, "it is very right that there should exist these guides to virtue in this world of ours. Guides! I beg pardon humbly,—I mean shrines of virtue. Let me examine closely into my behaviour. I met these two ladies wandering from their homes—indeed without a home—I escorted them hither—risked life and honour to place them in such a position that they might demand justice—as suing for it had been found useless labour—and behold! the younger, gentler being, turns round to upbraid me for my pains. It is ever thus—I am made the fool of others—toil for others—intrigue for others—fight for them—scarcely asking of myself whether the cause be good or bad—relying only on the warmth and generosity of my own feelings! And what has resulted from this course? It were idle

to enumerate—but if I progress in the same eccentric track—next month will find me paying my devoirs to Montpensier, or riding, lance in hand, at the right hand of Guise. It will never do. While acting for my own private welfare, I was humble, unambitious, abstemious, contented with the labour of exercise without reward, and charitable to my neighbours' failings. But I threw my services into the hands of the King of Navarre; and I immediately became a spy and a liar.—I do service to the Queen of France, and I become a minion and an adventurer, shuffling the text of expediency into every shape of usage and pretext; —and for her proud daughter, and this girl without a name, I have rendered myself a traitor to the sacred rites of hospitality—I—who have hitherto thought of myself so honourably, that I might be trusted to walk through unguarded treasures—between the unbarred gates of my enemies, if they placed confidence in me! How miserably I am fallen off in my own esteem—and for what? To serve others with kindliness, which I have been fool, miserable, ignorant fool enough, to mistake for the impulses of honour and justice! By all that yet remains of good in me, I will never do another kind action, if I exist for ever on this lower world! I will now live for myself,—and I

truly hope that my old virtues will return to me."

The Baron was, at this moment interrupted by a footstep. It was Lisette crossing the hall—he desired her to call Antoine, as he had commands for him. To the astonishment of the servant, De Nevailles instructed him to have their horses ready for starting secretly from D'Usson within two hours.

The interval was employed by the Baron in writing to the Queen of Navarre respecting the policy to be pursued towards her family if she should happen to negociate with them; also towards the garrison and household of D'Usson; and on other matters connected with her fortunes. With Pomini, now governor of the fortress, he had a long conference, in which he recommended an increase of the garrison without delay;—in which labour, the Baron could not assist him from his known difference of religious belief, which would have prejudiced the service in the eyes of Catholic soldiers.

The interview over, De Nevailles left the rock and its stronghold, without seeing either the Queen or Emilie. From the peasants in the vicinity, he learned that the forces of Navarre were still encamped in the northern district of the province;

but he was not in a mood to care either for friends or enemies: his thoughts tended homewards; and thither he directed his course; and arrived, without accident, at the Chateau De Nevailles.

CHAPTER XXX.

> Ville de Blois, naissance de ma Dame,
> SEJOUR DES ROIS, et de ma volonté.
>
> RONSARD.

WHILE Duke of Anjou, and brother of the King of France, Valois had acquired the reputation of being the most accomplished Prince in Christendom; but the acquirements on which this far-spread renown were founded, manifested more brilliancy than solidity, and the deeds of arms, with which Europe rung, were confessedly the work of others, ostensibly serving under his command. It is easy for one of royal lineage to reap the praises of his countrymen,—but to be really great, he must pass through an ordeal of labour or adversity, and surmount the difficulties which beset an earthly career by the efforts of unconquerable will. The energies of a man's mind are never called forth till he has been trampled upon; genius may present her fairy picture, or raise her voice

within the sanctuary of his breast, but she will never gain the mastery of his being, till the world's pressure has either calumniated, humiliated, or stricken him with the harrowing prospect of poverty. Then the voice and the power within struggles for dominion—a conflict ensues—and the soul holds the outward man captive; the inspired ploughman forsakes his rustic implements and rushes to the mart of poetry; the mechanic seizes the pencil or the graver as the gladiator his sword; and he, who has hitherto walked quietly in the ordinary paths of life, throws himself desperately, but with a charmed weapon withal, into the arena of human contention, and becomes demagogue, patriot, statesman, or man of letters.

Under the shadow of the power of the Queen-mother, Valois had lived in security; and the brilliant surface of his nature faded beneath the corroding influence of sloth and luxury, while his youthful enthusiasm, the voice of his soul, sunk into superstition, and vagrant phantasy. But when he became an outcast from the palace of his ancestors; a fugitive from the power of a rebellious subject, his soul cast off the weeds of effeminacy; he awoke to a sense of his own manhood—his consecrated office—and the guardianship of the prerogative of his house.

For many days after the retreat from the capital, he pondered deeply on his fallen condition, till at length he saw the path which might lead to victory, or at worst an honourable and desperate contest. Without seeking the advice of Catherine, who lingered at her hotel in Paris—without seeking to remonstrate with the Protector, whom the Catholics now looked upon as their chosen king—he launched out the thunder of his policy with a vigour, which startled as much as it delighted, the Queen-mother, who was heard to say, that for the future, she must live apart from her son, as her presence smothered his natural capacity.

From Chartres, where the monarch had taken refuge, he issued a proclamation summoning a meeting of the states of the kingdom to be holden at Blois, to take into consideration the unhappy state of affairs which distracted France, and to provide a remedy for the evils which oppressed it. When faction has reared its head, and threatens to abolish the ancient laws and usages of society—when a bold rebel menaces the life and liberty of his sovereign—what defence so wise and politic as an appeal to the whole nation, through the form of its most justly valued rights? To an assembly of the states, or *Tiers-Etats*, which was composed of deputies from the clergy, nobility, and burgesses

of the kingdom, sitting in the presence of, and in consultation with, the monarch and the great officers of the state, he appealed for protection and a renewal of his kingly sway.

To such a summons, Guise and his adherents could not with any shadow of reason demur; and what pretence, asked Valois of his councillors, can the Duke make for his illegal violence before the States, which exist only through the laws he has broken?

Such must have been also the nature of the Protector's reflections, for though Montpensier was for treating the proclamation with contempt, yet the proceedings of her brother were greatly changed after it had been made public; he saw that he must not yet quit subtlety for a more open weapon—and so powerful were the reasons he alleged for his conduct, and so tempting the future course of policy which he planned for himself and his party, that even *Madame la Duchesse*, succumbed—and the Duke, as it were, joined issue with the appeal of Valois.

The tact and penetration of Guise were clearly manifested in his opposition to the headlong impulse of Montpensier, as every well-disposed Frenchman was pleased with the peaceful vista which the forthcoming concurrence of the States

presented to his imagination; it was regarded as the panacea for every evil, and its advent looked forward to with eagerness.

Nor were the Huguenots less delighted with the prospect of order and security which the anticipated meeting of the assembly presaged, for they expected, through the disunion which existed between the royal party and the faction of the Protector, to gain a consideration and importance which might entitle them, at the least, to the confirmation or renewal of the spirit of the many treaties of peace entered into with them, and as often violated by the Catholics.

Blois, called the City of Kings, from the circumstance of the palace having been chosen by the house of Valois as the scene of education of many its princes, is situated in the province of Orleanois, and on the banks of the broad and picturesque Loire. From the Fauxbourg Vienne on the southern side of the river, the city presents an amphitheatre of houses rising gradually from the banks to the highest elevation of the hill, whereon the Cathedral tower crowns the whole. To the left is seen, at the remotest corner of the city, the gigantic Chateau De Blois, the favourite residence of the Kings of France, and the object of their lavish magnificence.

If Blois had not been already famous, it would have gained celebrity from the condition which it presented previous to the opening of the States. The chief nobility and clergy of the kingdom were assembled within its walls, together with the burgess-deputies, from every province of France,—while in its lordly and favoured castle, the King and his royal parent held their court, enlivened by the ample train of ladies of honour, which it was the ambition and policy of Catherine to entertain. The streets were gay with the glittering dresses of the noblesse, thronging every avenue, to enjoy a freedom which the crowded old fashioned dwellings could not afford to their new occupants.

The castle is situated at the north-west corner of the city, seeming at first glance to be beyond the walls, yet in reality connected with it, by a causeway cut in the rock. Entering by this avenue, the spectator beholds in the outer court, a noble gothic edifice dedicated to St. Sauveur; passing by this token of the piety of the French monarchs, he arrives at the inner court, surrounded on every side by the lofty stories of the chateau, which from the various orders of design displayed, might be compared to the façades of four distinct palaces brought into contact by magic. One

angle presents a florid gothic structure of noble height, decorated with cognizances, devices, and armorial bearings, sculptured in stone; another,—a pile of Roman and Grecian designs intermixed, an architectural importation from Italy; while facing this elevation, stands a solemn mass of old masonry, the dwelling of the ancient Counts of Blois, who had need of a fortress as much as a palace.

It were an endless task to enumerate the inmates of this vast edifice; suffice it to say, that Catherine, full of smiles and gaiety, was sojourning there with her moody son, who appeared to his friends to be labouring under the weight of a resolve too mighty for his energies. D'Usez and the Princess of Condé found incessant food for laughter in the awkward bearing of many a provincial noble, and his gentle dependents, who honoured the *fêtes* of the Queen with their presence. The Marquis De Cœuvres, a supplicant at the *Chateau de Blois* for the recovery of his commandancy and fortress, and a deputy of the noblesse to the states, was, by favour of her Majesty, lodged at the castle with the fair Gabrielle, who had not yet appeared in public. Margaret was not behindhand with the Marquis; she had dispatched Father Roquelaure to the Queen-mother to advocate her cause, and

explain the necessity which forced her to the seizure of D'Usson. Villeroi and De Biron, D'Espernon and his vain Duchess, erst, Countess of Candales—De Quelus and Mademoiselle D'Entragues, a froward sarcastic beauty, with more malice and fewer charms than Candales; De Miron, the royal physician, a pompous functionary; and many others, whom we cannot, at this moment, recollect, graced or disgraced, as it might happen, the court of Blois.

In addition to these, were certain Huguenots, staying at Blois, under a safe conduct from his Majesty, ostensibly to represent their grievances to the States, but in reality, that they might be at hand to negociate a treaty of alliance with the court. But a treaty of alliance with Catherine was no easy matter to accomplish; her policy, as we have before declared, was to keep both parties balanced against each other, and to incline to neither; she had indeed written privately to Navarre, to request the presence of his agents with power to conclude an alliance with her son, but she had beforehand determined to keep them in play till the last moment—and if that monster Guise and his faction could be quieted, without their aid—to send them home as wise as they had arrived.

Nor were they long in discovering her intention, thought hey had no power to influence her will. The Count De Grammont, unlike our courtly gossiper and tell-tale gallant of a later period, was a rough martial noble, who had spent his whole life in fighting for his faith; he was destitute of all diplomatic capability, save an obstinate will and determined courage, which indeed, are often of great service in withstanding the covert finesse of subtler minds, which have power to turn every one to their purpose, who does not turn a deaf ear to argument of every description, simple or insinuating. He had been at Blois upwards of a month, having arrived there with his friend, in obedience to the specious wish of Catherine, before the assembling of the deputies, that they might have leisure to discuss the articles of the treaty; and he would have left the city, full of anger and impatience at her duplicity, had not the Baron De Rosny, afterwards Duke of Sully, his co-agent in the private embassy, withheld him from this open manifestation of spleen.

With the exception, perhaps, of De Nevailles, the Baron De Rosny had acquired the greatest influence over the mind of the brilliant, and, it must be confessed, somewhat wayward, king of Navarre; and no man better deserved his power, or

served his master with more fidelity. To the favourite of Catherine is due the rare merit and the honour of the hazardous task of awakening the captive monarch from his luxurious dream of sloth; but to De Rosny, into whose care he fell, when De Nevailles quitted his royal friend after their escape from Fontainebleau, must be attributed, in a great degree, the procuration of the finances necessary for keeping together the army which won a name and a halo of glory for the Bourbon, at Coutras. But this was not his whole merit.

At the birth of Navarre, nine lives stood between this Prince and the crown of France; but the greater proportion of these having fallen into the sleep of dusky death, De Rosny was struck with the idea that the jesting prophecy which he had foretold of his Majesty, when he first saw the Prince, a gallant youth of fifteen, riding by the side of the Admiral Coligni, might prove in due time a grave truth.

That the prophecy had been uttered in a jesting mood there can be but little doubt; though, on the death of the Duke D'Alençon, the Baron thought proper to declare that the prediction which he had uttered many years previous, that the Prince of Bearn would be, at a future period, king of France, he had received from an astrologer and

mathematician. But even antecedent to the decease of the illustrious tennis-player, De Rosny had pointed out to Navarre that there existed but two out of the many lives which barred his possession of the French crown; that he was a child of destiny; that, at his instigation, his nativity had been cast, and that he would be the first Prince in Europe.

For De Rosny was but too well aware of the sluggish nature of the Bourbon; and saw the necessity of urging him onward. He had been the principal adviser in the secret mission of De Nevailles, whose face was unknown in Paris, to the imprisoned monarch at the Louvre; and when the captive escaped from his silken chains, and flew to Rochelle, De Rosny wrought upon the temper of the Prince till he produced the hero of Coutras out of the voluptuary of the Parisian saloons.

The death of D'Alençon increased the value of Baron's prediction, and kept up the excitement of the monarch throughout the winter; he was scarcely ever seen otherwise accoutred than in his military harness, and at the head of his mounted arquebusiers. But though the early spring saw the Prince push forward his forces into the heart of the kingdom, even to the central province of Auvergne; he forced no strong position—fought no battles—

but loitered about the province like one bewitched. His predicting councillor, though a brave man, occupied but a subordinate post in the armies of the Huguenots, and employed himself chiefly in the financial department—drawing supplies from all the reformed cities and provinces, and preparing a train of artillery, as Navarre was almost destitute of ordnance.

But when the month of May showed Valois a fugitive from his capital, and De Rosny saw that that event made no impression on the monarch encamped amid the mountains of Auvergne, he felt convinced that Navarre had fallen into a state of lethargy, or was occupied in some trifling amour.

In consequence of this impression he hastened to the Navarrese camp, and arrived there about the same time that Margaret had taken possession of D'Usson. The Bourbon made excuses to his councillor, for his dilatoriness, saying that he had been long waiting for an opportunity to surprise the fortress. De Rosny as well as the other Huguenot chiefs were anxious to know how their leader would act with respect to his neighbour and consort; they were all bitter enemies to Margaret and her Mother, and were consequently overjoyed to hear that he did not intend taking advantage of

his relation with the present chatelaine of D'Usson, to renew their ill-matched and fruitless union. But as there was every prospect of Valois dying without issue, even if he were not cut off speedily by violence, the friends of Navarre were anxious that their chief should not die childless, as was to be apprehended from his present separation from his consort, and they recommended, that he should propose a divorce to Margaret, who would consent to it more readily while only Queen of Navarre, than she would if her brother's decease placed her husband on the throne of France.

After several weeks' delay, Navarre, acting on the suggestions of his friends, proposed a conference with his Queen which was acceded to; and at which she gladly assented to a divorce from a marriage which had been forced on her, and at a time when her heart was lacerated with grief. De Nevailles had already left D'Usson, but Roquelaure drew up the conditions, on the fulfilment of which, her Majesty promised to consent to the divorce, and which had relation to dowries, allotments of lands, and other provisions, their extent contingent on the succession of Henry to the throne of Valois.

As Margaret was a favourite with the priesthood, having founded several religious houses on

certain lands bequeathed her by her royal father; she ventured to dispatch an emissary to Rome to propitiate his Holiness to grant a divorce; she sent other messengers to her clerical friends to second her appeal at the Holy See.

Thus did all three parties, the Huguenots, the King, and the Queen of Navarre, heartily agree on the divorce; but each had private and potential reasons unknown, or at least, undeclared, to the others.

While the negociation with Margaret was pending, the proclamation of Valois arrived for the assembly of the States at Blois, in the September ensuing. Visions of peace now floated before the imaginations of the Huguenots; and as the three parties which divided the kingdom were supposed to be about equal in strength, it was believed, that an end would be put to their mutual differences, and articles of concord agreed to.

Ere the time arrived for the assembling of the deputies, a letter was brought to Navarre by a confidential agent of Catherine, requesting him, as we have before related, to urge the Huguenot noblesse to send representatives to the States; and that the deputies chosen should be secretly entrusted by his Majesty with credentials to conclude a treaty of alliance with the French court as a mutual protec-

tion against the treacherous designs of the Protector of the League.

It was this request which had brought De Rosny and De Grammont to the court at Blois, where they arrived privately a month previous to the meeting of the *Tiers-Etat.* Catherine, who was determined to be prepared for the most disastrous result, persuaded them to write to Navarre to concentrate his forces as near as possible to Blois, without inducing a necessity on her part of ordering her marshals to proceed against them. This measure was acceded to; and De Rosny pressed her Majesty to sign the treaty; but she contrived to put aside his demands without committing herself to a decided refusal to complete the alliance.

It was this double dealing which had so exasperated the rough De Grammont, and determined him to quit the city, from which resolve, as we have before intimated, he only relented at the pressing instance of De Rosny. But the Baron, calmer, subtler, and a superior diplomatist, though exceedingly annoyed at the duplicity of Catherine, fretted his imagination to invent a scheme of policy which would prevent the Huguenots being cajoled by our lady of the Louvre.

In this dilemma, he wrote to De Nevailles to hasten to Blois, convinced that he was the only

man who could influence her Majesty, and promising that a safe conduct should meet him on the journey—and that in the event of Catherine giving way to her rage, when she discovered his identity with the lost Villa Franca, that he would offer up his own life, in expiation of her revenge.

The letter reached the diplomatist at his chateau, but he shook his head at the contents, and declined the office. He saw only a prospect of fresh dangers and the recurrence of a course of action, for which he would be afterwards blamed by the ungrateful friends who had solicited his services.

De Rosny was in despair when he received the reply, but determined to put up with no refusal in a matter which concerned so closely the fortunes of the Huguenots—for he foresaw that a union between the French court and Navarre would be the only means of vanquishing the Protector of the League, and bringing about peace—he wrote to his Majesty concerning the refusal of the Baron.

But in the meanwhile, Margaret, who had been surprised at the hasty departure of De Nevailles from D'Usson, and no less at the grief which Emilie could not longer conceal, questioned her on the cause, and having brought her *protegée* to a confession, assured her that the heart of the Baron had never been estranged from her; and that he

would, after a while, return a penitent knight to solicit pardon for his absence, and a remission of the continuance of his punishment.

But finding that the dismissed lover did not return to the feet of his mistress, and having herself need of his services, for his Holiness required that the Queen-mother should be consulted on the matter of the divorce, she wrote to the Baron requesting him to proceed to Blois, and endeavour to induce Catherine to consent to her final separation from Navarre,—adding cunningly, that Emilie joined with her in this request; and that as he had kept faithfully the secrets of the Queen-mother, he had nought to apprehend from her anger.

"I differ with you entirely, Madame," exclaimed De Nevailles, when he had finished the perusal of the letter;—"her Majesty will be shocked to discover that her riches were in the keeping of an enemy—she will gloat over their recovery—and lock up the casket safely in her own archives! But nevertheless I must go! Chance has ever befriended me, and may be my guardian-deity once more."

He had scarcely made this resolve when a long and urgent epistle, or command, arrived from his liege, conjuring him to aid De Rosny in carrying into execution the meditated alliance. The Baron

wrote a consenting reply, and after several days' preparation, started for Blois.

Two days previous to the opening of the States, our pair of Huguenots were seen issuing from the cabinet of the Queen-mother, after an interview, which had ended like every other attempt, unsatisfactorily. De Grammont, the taller of the two, had long past the meridian of life, yet retained the strength and carriage of a warrior;—his features were harsh and inflexible, and his dress carelessly arranged and void of decoration. De Rosny displayed as little taste as his friend in his habiliments, which were, however, adorned with jewels of considerable value;—for the politic wisdom of the Baron had taught him the advantages resulting from a regard to personal economy. When he removed the jewelled cap from his brow, he displayed features characteristic of intelligence rather than enthusiasm, only indicated by the brightness of his eyes when excited in the ardour of discourse. His deportment was naturally dignified, but betrayed to close observers, a gratuitous affectation of lordly bearing, for which there was not the least occasion, as he had neither lowness of birth to conceal or ignorance to hide.

"Shall we not seek Father Anselm?" cried

De Grammont, observing that his companion was taking a contrary direction.

"Aye! to disclose to him the light of day, when he should remain in darkness!" replied De Rosny in a low voice and reproving tone;—"but never mind what the old tigress and her cub have said; they must fall into our arms at last, or *Notre Dame de Louvre*, as she is profanely called, will sadly over-reach herself;—let us walk in the gardens which will one day belong to our master."

With this request, the other complied; and as they had been admitted to the palace often enough to be acquainted with its interior, they found their way without assistance through several suites of rooms; and crossing a corridor, emerged on a balcony suspended along the exterior of that side of the palace which overlooked the gardens, and which was placed at a right-angle with the course of the Loire, over whose western track, in its journey to the ocean, the eye of the spectator wandered.

De Rosny and his friend stopped to gaze on the magnificent scene spread out beneath them. The forest of Blois, the winding river, and the forest of Chambord on the opposite bank, with part of its superb palace, built by Francis the

First, formed the grander elements of the prospect, which was dotted throughout with innumerable chateaus and convents of the various religious orders, which in this, as in every other district of France, save within the quarters of the Huguenots, who had dismantled all within their reach, were very numerous.

"Those cowled thieves swarm here as thickly as the bees in the gardens of Pau," cried De Grammont, "yet why should the reformation be confined to a few provinces? With God's help, matin and vespers, the host and its idolatries, shall in a future age, be forgotten words from the Pyrenees to the Rhine."

"I say, Amen! to such a hope," replied De Rosny; "but let us recollect we are now labouring to that end, and must fix our eyes steadily on each day's purpose, and forget the glorious accomplishment in the means. We are humble instruments of a Divine will, and our looks must be humble.—Blood will be spilt soon."

"Mine has been spilt for many a year," rejoined the Count.

"Aye, but I mean signally! not in the tented field, but in the crowded hall, or the dainty banquet-room, or mayhap," continued De Rosny, "in the assembly of the States itself."

"And whose blood?" murmured De Grammont, with somewhat of an incredulous smile.

"Whose!" exclaimed the Baron, "is it not palpable?—Walk hither, lest some one be within hearing. I tell thee what, cousin and fellow-labourer, and mark my words!—either Guise will kill the King, or the King will kill the Duke."

"Ah! your sharp eyes have shadowed out a plot then!" whispered the Count, grasping the arm of his friend;—"but it matters not to me which falls, for both must go to make room for our liege."

"Bravely spoken, cousin," whispered the other, "you grow more discerning. *It does not matter which*, you say. Bravo, well spoken:—but it does matter which!—yet let us not even whisper so close to stone-walls, but retire to the trees, or I might say, statues and *termini*, for stone is more plentiful than wood in the gardens of *Notre Dame de Louvre*. I like to repeat that profanity."

At the farther end of the balcony was a flight of steps, which conducted the visitor into the gardens without the necessity of his re-entering the palace—a noble contrivance, as it afforded the inmates in their progress to the sylvan beauties of the *Chateau de Blois*, a grander view of the wide-

spread scene, than they would have gained by issuing from the palace from the *rez-de-chaussée* beneath.

By these stairs the two friends descended into the upper gardens, from which a gallery and staircase led into the lower, which were distinct from the former, by reason of the abrupt descent of the ground as it approached the banks of the river. From a paved circular space ornamented with statuary, several noble avenues branched out, each terminated by some object of the architect or sculptor's skill.

"Let us attempt to carry that classic temple," said De Rosny, entering the most retired avénue; —"it cannot make a very stout resistance, we shall there be free from eaves-droppers."

"It matters materially, Count," continued his friend as they walked up the broad avenue, "whether the King kill Guise, or Guise kill his Majesty of France—and for this reason. If Guise kill the King, no one will be found to revenge his death; and the arch traitor will live to occupy the throne of right belonging to our own liege lord—but if Valois kill the Duke, the priests will kill his Majesty, and so revenge the slaughter of their chief. Thus the road will be open to the King of Navarre, who will carry the sceptre *jure*

divino. It is scarcely accounted a secret that the monks have already made an attempt on the life of Valois—perhaps more than one—and his Majesty holds himself very privately, out of the reach of strangers in consequence. Ah! no! they would not let him escape, if his fingers were concerned in the death of the Protector of the League. They may even achieve their purpose without such excitement—but I hope not—for we should then stand in the same predicament as if Guise had done the act."

"But you have not yet told me, Baron," observed De Grammont, "what are the signs by which you dare predicate such an out-burst of man's will. I can neither dream nor prophesy, and am perhaps dull-eyed, even to those things which lie about me. You heat a sigh or a moan, or perceive a shudder, perhaps,—and upstarts a picture of destruction to distract your vision!"

"Out-bursts of man's will!—as you designate them," replied De Rosny, calmly, "never distract my vision. Nothing moves me but the wretched state of Navarre's finances—money is the spring and war-horse of chivalry. I have sold the growth of all my thick well-stocked plantations to place our army on a respectable footing—and I'll make the Catholics repay me."

"When Navarre sits enthroned in the Louvre, he will not forget us," said Grammont; "but you have forgotten the signs!—are they such as a plain soldier like myself can fashion into a forthcoming truth?"

"Since I have been in this most idolatrous city," replied the Baron, "where even the mass-ridden artisan pretends that he speaks a purer dialect than us of the purest blood of France, I have seen Valois every day. I have noted those shrugs and starts, and compressions of the eyebrows—they used to be arched and expansive—and I glean from these signs, that his mind is in labour, and will bring forth a sharp-toothed dragon, which will dart its sting unawares into its parent's foe—and then sink cowardly into the earth! Valois is mad—mad with an imprisoned will!"

"I can discern a glimpse of meaning," exclaimed Grammont, smiling, "but I cannot see through your image clearer than did our gracious liege when you placed before him a scheme for the consolidation of the Navarrese revenues!"

"Come! come! cousin De Grammont," cried the Baron good-humouredly, "wit ought not to originate in ignorance and defective perception. We have both need of it against that bantering

"sceptre and cowl! helmet and tonsure! pike and crosier! Thus is the throne of Charlemagne bound to the rotten sanctuaries of bigotry and cruelty."

"Even so," replied De Rosny, "but Valois is himself ashamed of yonder work. Catherine, with an affectation of making me her confidant in a little disclosure, said that his Majesty had made a grant to the Capuchins of the land, and they evinced their gratitude by sending half their brethren to join the army of monks at the affair of the barricades."

"True! they wanted the chateau itself," said the Count, "but look, the balcony of the castle is crowded with dames and gallants—we need not enter the palace amid a shower of jibes and smiles, as harmless as snow, but quite as annoying. Let us walk by this stagnant puddle—an emblem of yon spider's-nest. Father Anselme may have received advice of the arrival of De Nevailles."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Est-ce Narcisse qui aima
L'eau qui sa face consomma,
Amoureux de sa beauté vaine?
EPITAPH ON THE COUNT DE QUELUS.

AMID the death-struggling of dynasties, and the fierce contentions for supremacy; when thrones which have grown ancient in the eye of the world are tottering beneath the blows of new powers and authorities, the voice of mirth and gaiety is still heard in the pauses of the storm. Slaughter succeeds festival, and festival succeeds slaughter—ere the dying hero or partisan draws his last breath, the war-note which proclaimed his doom is hushed by the tinkling cymbal of Terpsichore; the shifting panorama of life changes from the battle-field to the illuminated saloon; the orchestra strikes up a fresh tune; and human figures flit round in a mazy ring.

Coutras! De Joyeuse! these are but names floating in memory! yet they may again become

realities! But in the interval, Catherine De Medicis holds her court in the kingly city—in its proud palace! The grand hall is more lustrous than day! It breathes an atmosphere of light! Music is borne floating from distant saloons to the guests of royalty.

All the chivalry and beauty of France, which had continued faithful to the house of Valois, were congregated in the superb hall of the palace. Guise and his adherents were left to brood over their schemes, and thicken their treason, forgotten for one night by the gay revellers.

Amid the gallants who graced the fête of the Queen-mother, none were more conspicuous than the Count De Quelus, the knight of the green cuirass. In the tented field he was but a star of secondary importance; his stature was overreached —his bravery equalled—his skill surpassed; but in the saloon, he was unrivalled. The Count was rather below than above the ordinary height; slenderly proportioned—too much so for the taste of the age—had not his limbs been moulded so harmoniously in youthful symmetry that criticism was silenced even in the mouth of the hardy warrior, or the fair dame, taught to regard a giant stature as the beau-idol of manhood. His features regular in contour and aristrocratic in expression,

were pale—destitute both of the rustic glow of health, and the habitual flush of the soldier—a fault inexcusable in the eyes of D'Usez and the ladies of the court.

The Count was apparelled in a doublet and nether dress, which displayed his figure to the best advantage; he was decorated with the three orders of the King;—the *toison d'or*, or golden fleece, which accrued to the house of Valois by the acquisition of Burgundy—the order of St. Michael; and lastly, the badge of the Holy Ghost, a dove in the centre of golden radii.

Yet notwithstanding his elegant shape, decorative jewels, and graceful movements, De Quelus was not a favourite with the ladies of Catherine's court. Whether it was their fault,—a resentment evinced towards one who had invaded their province by a more than ordinary attention to personal *economia*,—or whether an exquisite is too much in love with himself to pay those devoirs to the sex which they hold as lawful prerogative,—we cannot say; but can only regret that many a gallant less deserving of ladies' regards, was more favoured than the Count.

We are not certain, however, but that his ill-success partly arose from a secret contempt, felt rather than seen, which he entertained against his

friends of both sexes. He had spent much time in the gayest Italian cities, and had contracted a partiality for their fashions, and more refined tone of intercourse. With the ladies of Italy he had been avowedly a favourite; and their style of beauty and conversation prepared him for the distaste which he felt for his countrywomen.

The graces of civilization had not as yet, rendered the Louvre equal to the Italian courts in politeness; and De Quelus, upon his return, being gifted in a superior degree with the accomplishments of the land of his sojourn, became a reformer, and gained obloquy thereby, rather than admiration.

The festival was, indeed, the occasion of his first appearance among the gay creatures of the court, since the fatal *journée de Coutras*. The wounds received in attempting to rescue De Joyeuse, had forced the Count to remain many months in retirement at his estates; and which he had only quitted to attend the assembly of the States, having been elected a deputy by the noblesse of Languedoc, who were, like himself, favourable to the reigning dynasty.

The chief idea or image present to the mind of De Quelus, was his own trim person, in the adorning and taking care of which, consisted his prin-

cipal study. Not that the outward frame of flesh and blood which glittered in hall and bower to the admiration of beholders, was cherished by its owner to the entire forgetfulness of the spiritual portion of his nature; but mental accomplishments were cultivated not for the sake of displaying an elegant mind, but on account of the bodily grace which accompanied their outward volitions. The body in fact was not complete without a mind which could direct it harmoniously.

Even military renown was of inferior importance to the ambition of a graceful carriage, and a person *comme il faut.* The Count had been laughed at by D'Usez and her train for his pale complexion; but though he secretly despised the Duchess, yet vanity, like ambition and other feelings of the same generic character, is forced to seek its food in the smiles of contemned inferiors; so our knight of the fanciful cuirass resolved to remedy the imputed fault. Hardy exercise imparts a healthy glow to the complexion, said the Count:—and he joined the gaudy armament of De Joyeuse. But the stern pikemen of the Huguenot army dispelled the flattering vision of roseate cheeks; De Quelus exiled himself from the Louvre for awhile in despair, and now presented himself at Blois with his usual pale Italian hue.

The air of the lively Coranto had just ceased, and the guests were quitting the arena of the dance, when our knight of three orders found himself entangled in the meshes of D'Usez's wit. Unawares, he had dropped into a little circle, consisting of the Duchess, the Marshal De Biron, Mademoiselle D'Entragues, D'Espernon and his giddy wife, and Alphonso De Corso, an Italian gentleman, a follower of his countrywoman, Catherine.

"Nay, Monseigneur! do not run away," cried Madame, "we were but just now talking of your absence from our despairing eyes."

"Yes!" added the forward D'Entragues; "and we likened you to a gueldres-rose."

"What! afraid?" exclaimed Alphonso, staying the departing Count.

"I am not afraid, as you so facetiously express yourself in the brevity of your country's wit," replied De Quelus; "but Madame collects her power as boys do snow—so let it content her—the ball will be increased during my absence—I will bear the shower manfully when next we meet."

De Corso was about to reply, when a slight buzz of voices was heard near the hall-door; and upon the friends of D'Usez looking in that direction, they beheld a lady entering the hall, who immedi-

ately attracted all eyes to herself. Such an enshrinement of simplicity in a form so sweetly voluptuous, they had never seen before. The fair unknown's dress was much simpler than the rich display of her compeers; her care seemed to have been directed to her hair only, which was intermixed with gems glittering in their shady element; she was in company with another of long standing at the court, and whose polished air contrasted strongly with the perceptible provincial bearing of her companion.

A smile of triumph sat on the lips of De Quelus, which D'Usez perceived as she turned to her own circle after watching the course of the fair comet. There was some asperity in the tone with which she addressed the fastidious noble.

"Well, Monseigneur, you seem to have recovered your self-possession: may we know the method of your cure?"

"As simple as myself, Madame," replied the Count, "I was indulging in a mere suggestion, whether the crescent-moon be not jealous of the evening-star."

"The crescent moon, Count," retorted the Duchess, "fears no stars, and is obnoxious only to the gloomy clouds which lurk about her sky, threat-

ening moon, stars, and every thing else that is bright."

"And yet one cannot call Monseigneur gloomy," observed D'Entragues, in her pert malicious style, breaking the veil of D'Usez's metaphor, "with those diamonds on his breast. If he be indeed, a cloud, he is one turned inside out."

This abrupt remark of the provincial dame produced a general laugh in the circle, which made De Quelus very angry; he smiled as openly as the close contact of his double row of teeth would allow him.

De Biron, who had been watching the stranger lady during this contention, and who was now approaching near their group, said—

"I must speak to the fair Arcadian, and inquire what news from Arcady or the vale of Tempe. She wants but a spear to be a Thessalian huntress, or Dian herself."

"I wish she had one," exclaimed D'Entragues, "you, Marshal, should set the fair huntress the task of encountering that savage lion," (the malicious speaker looking, while speaking, at De Quelus) "now showing his teeth."

De Biron was disappointed, however, for the Cardinal Du Perron, and a Polish nobleman in

a dress trimmed with rich fur, engaged the lady in conversation. The Count meanwhile retreated from the presence of his friends that he might gaze in silence on the rustic beauty; he would gladly have learned her name, but asking such a question of any one was to the fastidious noble a procedure too vulgar for his refined taste; he felt that he could look upon her till he had read her title, fortune, and feelings in her face. Yet was she a simple maiden deficient in the courtly ease which the Count so highly prized.

"Ah! De Quelus has left us," exclaimed the Duchess, "he is as morose as De Bouillon in his penitential robe, and deprived of a dinner."

"Poor De Bouillon has just died at Geneva, among the heretics," said D'Espernon, "and left his sister heiress of the sovereign dukedom; a rare prize for some one of our friends! the bad Calvinistic fare must have killed him."

"He was as effeminate in his eating as De Quelus in dress," observed the Marshal. "Our brave Count, as I am told by a gentleman from Languedoc, since the recovery of his wounds, frightened the peasantry by riding about in the hooded penitential sack, to preserve his complexion from the tanning power of his country's sun. My friend once met him thus apparelled, riding at full

speed, followed by his dogs; and a first impression of the strange vision was derogatory to the priesthood. He fancied the rider a poor monk, who had taken a gentleman unawares; having seized his jewelled cap, and placed it over his own cowl; and that upon running away also with his horse, he was pursued by its master's hounds."

"And how did he recognise the Count?" said Alphonso.

"By the fanciful shape of his boot," replied De Biron, amid a roar of laughter.

The conversation was at this moment interrupted by a flourish of trumpets which announced the entry of their Majesties; Valois escorting his royal parent, attended by a train of ladies and courtiers. The Queen had thrown aside her plain sable dress, and was arrayed in a vestment of cloth of gold, a present from the Grand Seignior to the French Ambassador at Constantinople, and by the latter presented to his royal mistress. It was overlaid by an arabesque pattern, formed entirely of precious stones, which catching the reflection of the many candelabras and ornamented lamps, made her almost too dazzling for eyes to look on; her hair was ornamented in the fashion of the age with brilliant gems—and in front, above the forehead—by a star of large diamants.

Instantly conversation was suspended—all the guests bowed to their Majesties, who advanced to the middle of the saloon. As the company stood, awaiting the royal movements, one of the pages in the rear was nearly upset by Chicot, who came bouncing into the hall; and after surveying, with looks of astonishment, the position of the guests—for the entry of the royal party had fixed them like so many statues after the first salutation—he began a slow fantastic dance, kissing his hand to every lady as he passed by, till accidentally perceiving De Quelus, he paused with a look of admiration at the elegant figure of the noble, and after bowing profoundly, surveyed his own habiliments and rather awkward person, with a despairing shake of the head.

But presently he seemed to gather courage, and commenced adjusting himself *à la Quelus*, by throwing aside his thick hair—drawing tighter round his throat the collar of a pink doublet—undoing his sash, and tying it afresh, to the infinite mirth of the guests, after the manner of the Count, whose person he looked at, as if it were a mirror. But when his eye caught the jewelled dove glittering on the breast of the noble, he clapped his hand to his own bare doublet, and turning round, cast a piteous look toward Valois. He again sur-

veyed the Count, and after another melancholy shake of the head, retreated backward, incessantly bowing to his model—who took the whim in excellent humour and without flinching, which quite disarmed the ridicule—till he was close to her Majesty, whom he would certainly have borne down with all her splendour, had not the little froliesome page, whom he had previously ran against, placed himself on his hands and knees behind the jester. The fool was tumbled over, and lay on his back, sprawling at the Queen's feet.

Roars of laughter, in which royalty joined, followed the discomfiture of Chicot, who arose in a bad humour, and slunk aside, but the little page ran after him; and pointed, first, at the disordered rosette on the jester's shoe, and then at the trim feet of the Count. Chicot turned angrily upon his tormentor; but the malicious boy lifted up both hands to his curly head, and taking a flaxen lock in each, drew them out so as to represent the symbolic ears of a fool's crest; and after jerking his head from side to side in derision, he put one foot on the other, and executing a neat twirl, ran away from the ire of Chicot, and screened himself in the ample folds of her Majesty's train.

This attack, after his own fashion, was too much

for the stomach of the jester, and he retired silently to regain his courage and mirth.

As had been remarked by De Rosny, there was a change in the appearance of Valois; a mysterious deportment, seemingly the result of a feeling which allowed its possessor no repose; it evinced its activity by frequent and abrupt glances; these were succeeded by fits of absence, in which he disregarded the attentions of the courtiers. The splendour by which he was environed seemed irksome to him; though at intervals, he laughed immoderately, and at the most trifling objects. By the court, these symptoms were traced in part to their right source; they were regarded as demonstrations of humiliated pride in having been driven from his capital, mingled with reflections on apparent evil yet to come.

But his friends did not search deep enough; they had not the penetration of the Huguenot envoy; and imagined only the disorder of the passion, Pride, when, indeed, a chorus of demons were plotting within his soul. Even Catherine was deceived; she could not attribute any daring scheme to the mild superstitious Henry, now that he sat again under the shelter and influence of her active will. But whatever might be working within his mind, he did not make the Queen-mother a

confidant; from which omission, we may presume he thought she would have thwarted his policy.

The guests after awhile resumed dancing; in the midst of which entered the Baron De Rosny and his friend De Grammont, both seemingly much pleased with some secret source of delight. Heedless of the attention which they attracted to themselves by their marked difference of apparel, and carriage to the courtlier guests, the subtle Baron crossed the hall talking rapidly to the Count, as though they were in the council-chamber; while De Grammont, who was much taller, bent down in the attitude of listening; his rough military aspect and determined expression bringing to the memory of the male portion of the company the stern encounter at Coutras. Their position at Blois, as agents of Navarre, could not be concealed; for, although chosen deputies to the States, yet the rumour of certain conferences soon got wind, and further concealment was useless. To the surprise of the company, and the laughter of D'Usez, who said they must be suffering under the delusion of believing the hall to be her Majesty's cabinet, they walked straight to the Queen, with whom they were immediately engaged in earnest conversation.

During the colloquy, Father Roquelaure, pre-

suming upon his laical character of envoy from the Queen of Navarre, ventured to insinuate his giant-height into the hall of gaiety. As soon as he was espied, there ensued almost a round of applause—certainly a noise of greeting, of which, he could not but be sensible—but nowise daunted, the cordelier strode over the space which had but now echoed the steps of the light bounding feet of beauty, and joined D'Espernon and the Marshal.

But he was soon surrounded by the ladies, who eagerly demanded the latest news from D'Usson, and every particular connected with the Queen of Hearts; whose dominion over the fashions of the era was now assumed by her friend D'Usez.

Roquelaure was at first extremely circumspect in his replies, and spoke very guardedly of the conduct of the Queen of Navarre; but one question stimulated another—one reply necessitated a second, and he was gradually drawn into a history which he would fain have omitted. But the well-timed flattery of the fair creatures around him—the ready laugh and accordant smile which echoed his replies, threw him off his guard; and, forgetful that the old governor of D'Usson was at Blois, seeking redress for the forcible acquisition

of the fortress, he proceeded to depict the misfortunes of the Marquis in so ludicrous a light, that all were convulsed with laughter. To such a degree was he urged on by the subtle courtiers and their fair coadjutors, that he forgot the due distinction between right and wrong, and fairly praised the Baron De Nevailles for his ability.

"Yes!" exclaimed he, in reply to a remark of D'Entragues, "he is the cleverest man in France!"

"He is a foul cheat and a heretic! and yet not many degrees worse than yourself!" shouted a voice, which the cordelier, to his dismay, recognised to be that of the Marquis De Cœuvres.

Consternation was visible in the features of Roquelaure, who was now alarmingly convinced of his imprudence, and overheated excitation; but to his malicious auditors, who had gradually wrought him to this state, the *contretemps* was accounted a happy and ludicrous incident.

When a crowd of patient listeners hear the voice of a rival orator, or charlatan, or demagogue, beyond the limits of their close circle, so greatly do they become prepossessed of the desire of giving every competitor a fair chance, that the section nearest the new aspirant invariably opens, and brings the two rivals into collision. So was it

in the present instance,—and Roquelaure found himself face to face with the indignant Marquis De Cœuvres.

"If you wore not a garb of sanctity, Father Hypocrite," cried the Marquis, "you should answer your chuckling laughter with a death-rattle in your throat."

"*Monsieur le Marquis!*" cried De Biron, "you forget that you are in the presence of the Queen of France."

"I do! I do! Marshal!" said De Cœuvres, "but her Majesty would pardon me! I am calm! I will await a juster triumph than threatening this wicked cordelier."

The Marquis, who was the most loyal of subjects, was so moved by the appeal of the Marshal that he smothered his anger, and listened with apparent patience to an apology from the monk, who endeavoured, with the aid of a considerable share of rhetoric, to exculpate himself from any co-operation in the assumption of the fortress; but, however necessary this harangue might be for his own vindication, it was not listened to with half so much pleasure as his previous narrative.

The cordelier, who had fared as ill as Chicot, retired equally discomfited from the arena of contention. While the Marquis, who was now joined

by the fair unknown—no other than his daughter Gabrielle, who had remained secluded in the palace till this evening—became the centre of attraction, which the old noble cruelly took advantage of, to tell many a stale anecdote of the first Francis and his gay court. But men might readily shut their ears while gazing on the graceful rose of Cœuvres.

After awhile, the Marquis, who had no great tact in political matters, and spoke his mind more readily than would at all times have become a servant of Catherine, insisted that there had been a civil war in the streets of the city that very day; and for which he did not scruple to blame the authorities.

It was in truth at the commencement but a trivial affair, but might have grown, if De Biron had not luckily interposed the Swiss, into a serious encounter. A troop of the King's pages in their passage through the streets, met with several of the pages of the Protector of the League opposite the palace of Justice! Angry, taunting words, ensued, which were soon changed for the play of rapiers; the pages of the Duke were reinforced by his partisans, and the fight was becoming general when the Marshal arrived, and dispersed the combatants. Both Guise and Valois were anxious

that the matter should be hushed up, as such a paltry display of strength did not redound to the reputation of either; and especially as but one more day intervened before the meeting of the Assembly. De Biron endeavoured to convince the Marquis that the contention was beneath notice.

"Ah! *Monsieur le Marechal!*" exclaimed De Cœuvres, "I heard the tumult, and I was informed that many gentlemen took part in the contest. All your friends now here, were, no doubt, engaged."

"Not I, Monsieur, I assure you," said De Quelus, quickly;—"if it had happened two hours earlier, I should have been glad of the morning exercise, but I never touch a rapier, if I can help it, after dinner."

"It must have been a troop of market-women singing, which Monseigneur heard as he lay in bed," said Mademoiselle D'Entragues.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed De Cœuvres; market-women would not have sheltered themselves behind a breast-work of cabbages, which, I am told, the retainers of the Duke of Guise did in the market-place. Perhaps Mademoiselle can inform me what women can know about the stratagems of warfare."

"Oh! more than you are aware of Monsieur!"

cried De Biron, determined upon silencing the foolish garrulous old noble, "but there is this difference—men often venture in front of their breastworks, while women always keep close behind them."

This well-timed sally produced the intended effect; the group were agitated with laughter; and the Duchess D'Espernon, who had quitted the circle that she might gaze more closely at the pair of monsters, as she called them, who had engrossed the ear of majesty, now returned to communicate to her friends that the notorious Baron De Nevailles, *in propriâ personâ*, was at that instant in the palace, having just arrived from the country south of the Loire with instructions from his liege the King of Navarre.

"Thank Heaven!" cried De Cœuvres, "I will now charge the Baron to his face!"

"That you may do in a very short time, Monsieur," said the consort of D'Espernon, "her Majesty, who is extremely anxious to behold one so celebrated by his own party, has intimated a desire for his appearance in the hall, if he be not too much fatigued."

"Is he like Baron De Rosny?" asked D'Entragues addressing De Cœuvres, who was evidently much excited by the news.

"These heretics are all alike, Mademoiselle," replied the Marquis, "either smooth-faced rogues, or grim-looking troopers. Quite wild beasts—cunning foxes or surly wolves—I assure you! No Christian feeling at all in them—mere robber-chiefs, whom it behoves good Catholics to put down with a strong arm!"

Expectation was at its height when it was known that the Queen had invited the heretic envoy to her presence; all were desirous of seeing one who, in addition to his services in the cause of the Huguenots, had won so much upon the friendship of the Queen of Navarre, as to be entrusted by her with the most important secrets. Public fame had reported the Baron to have passed his life—or at least his youth, for he was not as yet advanced beyond the opening career of manhood—among Genevese doctors, itinerant Huguenot preachers, and the rough unpolished partisans of the heretic house of Bourbon and Navarre. Can such an education have rendered him aught but disagreeable to the voluptuous Margaret? was the question asked of each other by the courtiers of Valois.

The dance was suspended—the music which floated from the adjoining saloon fell idly on the ear unlistened to — the guests disposed in

groups over the entire extent of the hall, gradually drew near to majesty, that they might witness the expected exhibition. A spectator entering for the first time would have surmised the existence or approach of some dreadful calamity; a royal headache or fainting-fit, or mayhap, the busy calm which ensues upon the receipt of unwelcome intelligence;—the loss of a province or a kingdom.

Madame D'Usez took her station by the side of Catherine, who was seated in a chair of state placed for her accommodation close against the tapestry which covered the entire extent of the wall. On her left hand sat Valois in a less ostentatious chair; near him stood Villeroi, De Biron, and M. De Miron, the royal physician; on the right hand of her Majesty, and peeping over the shoulder of D'Usez, was seen the expressive features of the Princess de Condé, who looked upon the scene from her retreat, with the eyes of an *artiste.*

Curiosity was strung to its utmost pitch, when Davila, with a face more expressive than usual, entered the hall, followed by the Navarrese ambassador and his friends, De Grammont and De Rosny, who had retired from the royal presence to escort him to the foot of the throne. Whatever

fatigue the functionary might have undergone in his journey, it had left no traces of its existence on the manly features which met the gaze of all eyes; neither had it been permitted to put in a languid plea for an ill-arranged habit and neglected person. The ambassador had been allowed time to array himself with the utmost care. He was dressed in a suit of black, clasping his handsome figure from throat to heel with the compactness of sartorial skill; nor was the sable colour allowed to deepen into a gloom unbefitting the occasion; the laced frill around the neck—the dark sash of lace spangled with ornaments of jetty lustre—the sword-belt studded with diamonds, and vying in brilliancy with a dagger worn at the side, both hilt and scabbard lustrous with the same rare stones—a kingly present to an ancestor of the ambassador—and the sword itself, with its shining hilt and sheath of velvet—rescued the person of Monseigneur from the charge of gloominess.

As he stepped gracefully across the saloon, it seemed as though the breath of all the guests was suspended—a calm, unnatural yet impressive, reigned throughout—and silence was only broken by the echoing tread of the martial De Grammont, who strode after his light-heeled friend, as

a gaoler in the footsteps of one whose heart is light with newly-granted liberty.

But the wonder, of which this silence had been the mute symbol, was of a sudden voice-gifted, and there arose a discordant chorus of exclamations of surprise, which almost drowned the noise caused by the violent movement of her Majesty, who rushed from her chair of state.

When the momentary wonderment, and as it were confused vision of the spectators had passed away, they beheld the ambassador kneeling before the Queen, who seemed scarcely able to contain the violent emotions which agitated her frame, and which caused her to move rapidly to and fro before the envoy. The court, which had equal cause of wonder with its mistress, trembled for the safety of the kneeling suppliant, who was exposed to the threatened fury of a woman, whose anger was too great to allow her either to speak or stand still.

The ambassador, without attempting to rise, presented his credentials to her Majesty; and De Biron, anxious to perform a service to his former *protégé*, took the letter from his hands, and gave it to the Queen. Darting a glance of anger at the envoy of Navarre, she snatched the paper from the Marshal; but had no sooner uttered the words: "Well-

beloved Baron," than she flung it with scorn to the ground, and turning her back on the still kneeling noble, commenced talking earnestly to her son.

Meanwhile, the Marquis De Cœuvres, who, as he imagined, rightly understood the cause of this most bitter insult, approached her Majesty with a heart almost overcome with gratitude. He bowed; and she ceased speaking to Valois.

"Your Majesty," exclaimed the old governor, in a tone of deep-felt thankfulness, yet ludicrous from its mistaken impulse; "has made me the happiest of mortals. This, indeed, is compensation for my loss! But though his treacherous behaviour at D'Usson merits your anger—yet I pray you, now that my honour is satisfied—that you will not forget his character as representative of the King of Navarre, whom I do not wish slighted for my sake!"

Catherine looked at the Marquis for a few moments with surprise—but her features gradually relaxed, and she burst into one of her habitual fits of excessive laughter.

"For your sake! *O mon Dieu!*" cried the Queen, when her emotion had in some degree subsided.

Laughter is contagious, though it needed not the aid of sympathy to induce the guests to follow the

example of Catherine; it was impossible to think for a moment of the vain error of *Monsieur le Marquis* without mirth; it was equally impossible to behold his mingled astonishment and alarm at her Majesty's reply, without being as much convulsed as royalty.

Valois, who beheld only an enemy of his enemy, in the person of the Baron De Nevailles, took pity on his humiliating posture, and commanded him to rise; and in order to wipe away, as much as possible, the disgrace he had suffered, entered into conversation with the Baron.

"Behold our trusty councillor," exclaimed Catherine, sarcastically.—"Our good friends must excuse our emotion on meeting with a long lost friend!"

And with these words her Majesty, after saluting De Nevailles haughtily, left the hall with her ladies.

Notwithstanding the angry display of the Queen, it was her pride which had been chiefly wounded, and which had caused the violent outburst of rage. It was not her interest to quarrel with Navarre or his friends at the present moment,—and the Baron knew this as well as herself,—indeed, her critical position with the Leaguers, caused her to be delighted with the idea of holding the Huguenots

more closely in her grasp by the presence of the anticipated envoy—and had he gone through the ceremony of a private audience, it is possible his reception would have been very different.

But to meet in the face of the whole court the heretic Baron De Nevailles—and to discover at one glance that she had been duped and deceived—that her pretended adviser and councillor, the adroit Villa Franca, so pure in his religious faith, so bound up in the interests of his royal mistress, and so deeply in her confidence—was the same individual with the noted enemy of the Catholics, the daring abettor in the escape of Navarre, and one of the heroes of Coutras—was wormwood. Either herself or the Baron must be humiliated—and to permit him to come insolently to Blois, and outbrave her anger in her own palace, was not to be endured—the lightning of her rage vindicated her dignity, and though flashing indignantly, and as it were, beyond her control,—yet we should do injustice to the temper of our lady of the Louvre, were we to affirm that to have silenced it, was beyond her power. Quick as the passage of light, the thoughts which we have slowly elaborated and detailed, passed through her mind, when her eyes first encountered the figure of Villa Franca.

She retired to her cabinet to ponder on the ex-

traordinary occurrence which had befallen her, with its remote and immediate consequences, while De Nevailles was forced to undergo a tedious ordeal at the hands of his former friends, both fair and masculine, and to whom, in the presence of the amused Valois, he was obliged for peace-sake to narrate at length sundry portions of his adventures subsequent to his flight from the Louvre, in addition to the motives which induced him to flee. As he sought his chamber, he was met by the well-known face of the usher, and conducted to the cabinet of her Majesty, where, in the presence of De Biron, who was summoned for that purpose, he made a full confession of his exploits, and received a free pardon for his deceptive delinquencies in consideration of the fidelity with which he had preserved the secrets of the house of Valois—not the least of which was the double employment of our old friend Nicholas Poulain.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Fasse le ciel que tout ce beau trafic
Que remuez pour le repos public,
Comme mon feu ne se tourne en fumée!
Je vous dirai que jugement je fais
De nos Etats—c'est une masquerade,
Où les plus grands s'entredonnent cassade,
Feignans vouloir du bien public la paix.
*   *   *   *   *   *
Bref, dans Blois vous y voyez merveille,
Mais quant à moi je n'y voy qu'un chaos.

PASQUIER.

HOWEVER great the shock of surprise which Catherine experienced in beholding once more the insinuating Villa Franca; yet she was not yet fully aware of the extent to which the Huguenots—whom her Majesty was retaining by fair speeches and promises never intended to be fulfilled unless necessity forced their accomplishment—were practising their hidden policy beneath her roof. Could she have penetrated the intimacy which subsisted between De Rosny and Roquelaure, she would have been convinced of the truth, that those who

deceive most, are often themselves deceived when they least expect it; and in quarters where they imagine they are exercising the influence of a subtle mind over ignorance or honourable independence. Or could she have recognised, in the humble companion of Roquelaure, the chief of the Huguenots; could she have known that Father Anselm, ostensibly one of the brotherhood to whom the agent of the Queen of Navarre belonged, and who had been — as Roquelaure affirmed— drawn from his convent to act as secretary to our giant friend, was the hero of Coutras himself, we fear that a close confinement would have again been the lot of his Majesty; and that neither generosity nor policy would have intervened in his favour.

When Catherine requested of the Baron De Rosny that the forces of the Huguenots should be held in readiness to march to the aid of Valois, if an emergency should arise, and which the violence of the Leaguers assembled at Blois rendered very probable, Navarre told his friends, that he would himself repair thither, that he might be at hand to assist the court, and assert his own rights with respect to the succession.

It was the reverse of prudent, to attempt to carry into execution such a freak, but he was so

bent on the adventure, that De Rosny was forced to submit. And there was a show of reason in his argument, that affairs might take such a turn, that his own appearance at the assembly of the States, as Duke De Vendôme might be essential to the establishment of his claim to the throne of France on the demise of Valois.

But the arguments made use of by the Bourbon to justify his romantic journey to Blois were specious and deceptive, and intended only to conceal his real motives, which it is necessary for the consistency of his conduct that we should reveal.

It had been his fortune, or misfortune, to meet with Gabrielle on her return to D'Usson from a visit at Issoire; and some trifling service which he rendered at the ford of the Allier established their intimacy. The monarch, attended only by several of his train, was unknown to the fair D'Estrées, but the passion which he conceived for her, induced him to declare his rank, accompanied with protestations of affection which shocked the lady, unable to resolve the inconsistency of a prince professing attachment at a first interview; nor how one so famed for his chivalry and honour could insult her with the offer of what he had it not in his power to bestow.

But Navarre, whose warmth of temperament was

such that a short hour sufficed to render him a despairing lover, was not to be baffled by an obstacle which he had previously determined to remove. He explained to the lady that Margaret was indifferent to the union which had been forced upon her—that his own councillors desired the divorce of a marriage which would blight the prospects of the kingdom of Navarre—and that as rumour had already reported his consort to have quitted the court of her mother, she would gladly acquiesce in the proposal of a divorce; a measure, he added, she had long earnestly desired during their sojourn at the Louvre.

To these representations Gabrielle would have given but little heed, had she not been prepossessed in favour of the handsome prince, and in the charm of a meeting which wore the air of romance. She consented on their parting in the valley beneath D'Usson, that she would see him again, if it were only for the purpose of his exhibiting the proofs of his intended divorce from Margaret, and that his honour might be thus made clear to the lovely Chatelaine. That she kept her word—that their confidence grew daily—the vision which Jean La Roche beheld from the ladder, is sufficing proof.

Nothing was more opportune to the wishes of

Navarre than the arrival of Margaret at D'Usson; yet to Gabrielle it was a matter of self-reproach that she was entertaining, as a lover, the husband of the Queen. The forcible possession of the fortress, however, changed the feelings of its former mistress, who did not now check her emotions of secret triumph over the boast of the Louvre: the hospitality of her father had been outraged—but what a triumph! when the day arrived which would place the crown of Navarre on the head of his daughter.

The almost forgotten track to the summit of the rock was the path by which the Huguenot leader gained the bower of his sweet mistress;—but who could paint the alarm of the lovers when the head of the arquebusier was seen peeping through the lattice, and his voice heard jarringly on their pleasant discourse.

But when the peasant-clad Prince looked down, and beheld the number of the troop below—and Gabrielle, who flew to the window, half conscious that her father was at hand, heard his voice in angry expostulation with La Roche—both Navarre and the lady were at their wits' end. No time was to be lost—it was essential to the honour of the lady that the old soldier's eye-sight should be accounted deceptive—and the Prince was hidden ere the Marquis gained the chamber of his daughter.

De Cœuvres, as we have shown, was imposed on successfully. After De Nevailles had left the Marquis with his friends, the old noble was obliged to declare to such of the troops below as were still alive, the unfortunate result of the attempt: commanding them to return to the valley. When he retired to rest, Navarre was released from his place of concealment; a temporary ladder constructed; and the Prince escaped by the way he had entered.

The negociations which subsequently ensued between himself and his Queen, realized the hopes he had so much at heart; and when intelligence arrived that De Cœuvres and his daughter were at Blois, life became wearisome, till he had gained an opportunity of seeing her once more with the happy news of his speedy release.

Thus was the obscure Father Anselm, the cordelier monk, in the presence of his Huguenot friends, a warrior and a Prince, scheming future conquests, and planning new designs against his enemies;—in the presence of Gabrielle, a lover awaiting the happy hour to throw himself and his fortunes at her feet.

When the Baron De Nevailles, on the morning subsequent to his humiliating reception, related to the Count De Grammont and his politic friend

the fruits of his private interview with the Queen, they were overjoyed at the favourable result of the conference; and in return for this piece of good news acquainted him with the quality of the humble secretary of Father Roquelaure.

"Ah! you did wrong to allow his Majesty to come hither," exclaimed the favourite of Catherine, "the captivating scenes which meet his eyes in this gay abode, will bring on the old fit of luxury and sloth. I doubt not you have had trouble enough to restrain him within the limits of ecclesiastical demeanour, and the close secrecy which perforce must be adopted to prevent his well-known face from being recognised."

"In God's will! he is all our own," cried De Grammont.

"Is Madame De Sauves at Blois?" asked De Nevailles.

"For a young man, you are the most suspicious I ever met with," exclaimed De Rosny rather sharply—seeing that the Baron was not inclined to put faith in the good character of his liege. "Madame De Sauves is at Blois, Monseigneur! Here in the palace, actively intriguing, as I have discovered, but only for the furtherance of the plots of the Leaguer Guise, whose creature she now is."

"And does her Majesty know of it?" asked the Baron, smiling.

"It is the common talk," replied De Rosny, "I spoke of it to her—and she laughed, and said that Guise might as well look through a sieve as into the magic mirror of De Sauves' pretty face, for Madame D'Usez had instructed the Duchess D'Espernon, *née Comtesse Candales*, to disclose fictitious intelligence to De Sauves, which would mislead the Protector."

"I begin to feel already at home," said De Nevailles, turning on his heel;—"so you are in the confidence of our lady of the Louvre."

"Even so," replied De Rosny, "but where will this end?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Count De Grammont.

"I have often thought of you, Count, amid these plottings," said De Nevailles in a jocular mood;—"but are they not preferable to the cruelty which formerly characterized the proceedings of the court? think only of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, a name which makes the blood run cold in the veins of our honest burgesses of Rochelle! Ah! and what quiet modes our lady of the Louvre and her son Charles adopted to get rid of a troublesome gentleman of the court—a pretender to the favour of Mademoiselle Elizabeth,

or her sister, our gracious Queen of Navarre! How different since the peaceful *Henri de Valois* succeeded to the sceptre of his fierce brother. I would as soon have trusted myself to the waters of Biscay in a cooper's tub, as have come within the clutches of Catherine, if Charles, of happy memory, had been alive. Now every thing is decided by expediency and without violence, unless it be absolutely necessary. I am of more use alive than dead, to the Queen of France, therefore I still exist. If the hero of St. Bartholomew had been living and in the saloon, when I entered, he would have frowned, hung his head on one side, like an idiot, as was his custom when any person or event displeased him, whispered a few words to a complaisant noble—and ere the next day's sun illumined the roof of the chateau, my corse would have been discovered on the stair-case, or in the gardens, or, if decency were the whim of the moment, floating down the Loire."

"You speak truly," said De Grammont, "I heard one ask this morning if you were yet placed in custody—and upon the questioner receiving a reply in the negative, he said Villeroi had grown dilatory."

Then followed a mutual explanation of their respective views, with respect to the policy to be

adopted towards Catherine, to force her to fulfil the conditions of the treaty which she had herself proposed to the Huguenots. De Grammont showed himself excessively angry at the continual delays which occurred.

"She will wait till the opening of the States, ere she signs a single article," said De Nevailles, "and if she can make favourable terms with Guise, even at the sacrifice of ourselves, we shall assuredly be sent back to the place we came from—that Monseigneur may rely on—but you may trust to the pride and strength of the Protector that he will not submit to conditions, unless such as would be humiliating, beyond endurance, to the court. It will be a death-struggle! but bear with her Majesty's character. My policy has ever been that of the creeping ivy, which pliantly bends out of its course to humour every excrescence and projection of the tree it embraces, yet glides into the hollows and curves, from which it cannot be displaced without injury to the trunk. This is the secret of my power—the secret of my being at this moment free."

"We expect much from your presence, Baron," said De Rosny, "but let us now seek Father Anselm."

Roquelaure was lodged in the northern angle

of the chateau; in a pleasant chamber which overlooked a portion of the city, and the woods which skirted the road to Paris.

Here, in a deep-bayed window, was to be seen the cordelier's secretary busily engaged in writing to his friends; and here we must leave De Rosny and his brother-agents to canvass with their leader the course to be pursued on the morrow, at the opening of the States.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

O wretched land, if his outrageous pride,
His cruell and untempred wilfulnesse,
His deepe dissembling shewes of false pretence,
Should once attaine the crowne——

* * * * *

Who seeth not now how many rising mindes
Do feede their thoughts, with hope to reach a realme?
And who will not by force attempt to winne
So great a gaine that hope perswades to have?

GORBODUC.

THE ensuing morn saw the Duke of Guise, like a skilful general, marshalling his forces for the dreaded battle. He was confident in his own strength; but there was enough of danger in the artful manœuvring of Catherine, as well as in the loyalty which yet retained a hold in the hearts of many of the deputies, to inspire him with a prudential fear for the result; an apprehension sufficiently strong to cause him to neglect nothing which might operate in his favour without inspiring either himself or his followers with distrust.

The Protector of the League was now in the very zenith of his power. Did he desire a court? A train of nobles in semblance of royalty? Behold the dignitaries of the church; Archbishops, Cardinals, lordly Abbots, and influential preachers crowded his levee! Did he desire an army? Behold the numerous band of nobles who tendered their lives and fortunes in his cause, or to speak more correctly, in their own! When the busy thoughts which crowded his soul, allowed a short interval of repose—a moment's breathing time to look into himself—and also to look around and survey the base of that power, of which he was the apex—the summit of the pyramid—he felt more than mortal, a demi-god, a superior influence, to which even the Church bowed lowly—a Jupiter *tonans*, issuing forth his dread bolts to exterminate the olden corrupt Saturnial dynasty of France.

His very wishes were anticipated; the glance of his eye sought after, as though its gaze were healsome to the infirmities of humanity. He moved abroad in a circle of friends, who supported him as the rich setting of the ring encircles the gem.

Michael Angelo has represented the Almighty, the Giver of Life, as a powerless old man borne on the wings and shoulders of his angels! Daring enough to shadow forth the image of his Maker,

could his imagination have selected a more appropriate form? What power of limb! What energy of muscle! could the artist profanely have attributed to Him, whose arm directed the sun in its course? Whose will was law!

But can the human mind conceive through the sense of vision—the only sense to which the painter can appeal—a more striking exemplification of power, than that of a feeble old man, blind, powerless—not an arm stretched forth—not an eye with its lightning glance—and yet borne by the heavenly host of attendant angels—his ministers—the exponents of His will—those to whom he said "Let it be done,"—"And it was done, even as he willed it."

Could Michael Angelo have painted more potently the influence of Will to the sensuous human race? That race which obeys the rod, the scourge, the sword, the eye of command, and the threatening voice!

In a lesser degree, so moved the Protector of the League; the clergy, the noblesse, the burgesses of France, were the humble ministrants of his will;—the inferior intelligences who bore him onward in his triumphant career!—the slaves who lay in waiting to execute his wishes and save him from every labour but that of thought.

His chief partisan was the Archbishop of Lyons, a hot-headed prelate, who had been preferred by the Queen-mother, and now repaid the debt of gratitude by attempting to deprive her son of his birthright. It was the joint care of the prelate with the Chevalier D'Aumale to ascertain the sentiments of each deputy of the Tiers-Etat; and they had the gratifying task of reporting to the Protector, that a majority of the deputies was disposed to support him to the extent of his ambition.

With such a formidable engine at command, Guise had nought to fear; and he arrayed himself in his garb of office, as Grand Master of the Palace, with a delight which he had never felt before. The toil of ambition leaves its victim but little time to reflect on his own greatness, or to sun himself in the paradise of his own power; ere he has gained the summit of the elevation for which he has laboured, fresh difficulties present themselves in his path; glimpses of distant glades and shady bowers as the chariot of his destiny hurries on its course is all that he reaps for his labour—and the car of triumph at length reaches the shores of the waters of oblivion, just as the hero is asking himself whether the goal of happiness be yet won!

Yet Henry of Lorraine felt one hour of unmixed

pleasure ere he descended to the hostile arena of political strife. He was in his dressing closet. The sun threw its slant beams on the rich cloak of dark velvet, which had often graced his manly form, and which reminded its illustrious owner of the bright eyes which followed him in his path —he heard the stir and the tumult of the lordly feet which paced the hall, and his bosom heaved with pride as he thought of the haughty prelates who bowed obsequious to his will—his ears were greeted with the neighing of steeds, the clang of the martial clarion, the shouts of the multitude— and the blood flowed gaily through his veins, as though it had been nourished with celestial food.

The Grand Master of the Palace of the kings of France, surrounded by his most faithful adherents, met the humiliated monarch at the principal entrance of the Chateau de Blois, and conducted him to the detached edifice in the court-yard of the castle, where the deputies had been summoned to meet their colleagues.

While the heralds are marshalling the illustrious visitors, let us, with the reader's permission, show him the interior. The hall of the States was a spacious chamber of quadrangular shape, its width scarcely one-third of the length. The entrance was beneath a gallery. On the opposite side, at a

considerable distance from the wall, stood a range of pillars which supported the roof; these were covered from the ceiling to the floor with violet-coloured velvet sprinkled with fleur-de-lis of gold. Between the third and fourth pillars, much wider apart than the others, was a large dais or scaffold, on an elevation of several steps; the centre occupied by another ascent of a single step; here were placed the chairs of Valois and the Queen-mother.

Beneath the dais was a space environed by a barrier several feet in height, within which were seats and benches for the deputies of the three Estates. In the gallery, occupied by ladies, was an open window looking into the court-yard of the palace; at this post stood an usher, who summoned each deputy successively from the crowd awaiting admission. He was received at the entrance of the barrier by the heralds of Dauphiny, Bretagne, Normandy, D'Alençon, and Valois, and by them handed over to the Sieurs De Rhodes and De Marles, masters of the ceremonies, who seated him in his allotted place.

Every deputy had taken his seat ere a flourish of trumpets announced the entry of Valois and his royal parent, the Grand Master and the chiefs of

the household. Instantly the clergy and the noblesse arose and continued standing, whilst the burgesses, to the same tune, dropped on their knees, from which they did not arise till royalty had seated itself.

The *coup d'œil* of the assembly was the most imposing and august sight which France could present to her children. On the centre dais was seated the sovereign in his robes of state; on his right hand sat the Queen; in their rear stood the guard of two hundred gentlemen, armed with axes and formidable halberds; while on each side of their Majesties, and kneeling on a cushion, was seen a herald habited in his tabard of velvet and gold.

But the object of greatest attraction in the eyes of all beholders was the Grand Master, who sat in a chair on the lower dais with his back to their Majesties, and his face towards the deputies. Beneath the scaffold was a table at which were seated the secretary Villeroi, with his fellow-labourers of the cabinet, Beaulieu and Revol. Beyond the barrier, the hall was crowded with the citizens of Blois and strangers; while the gallery was graced with the presence of the ladies of the court and the foreign ambassadors, from the

turbaned Turk and furred Pole to the proud envoy of England, who quartered his mistress's arms with those of France.

When all was silent and the business of the State about to open, the Duke was observed to look slowly round the assembly, his eye glancing first at the extreme right, and travelling from deputy to deputy, as if to assure them by his firm and confident gaze that he expected each to do the duty to which he had privately pledged himself. It was the eye of a general measuring the strength of friends and foes; and as its owner, satisfied with the scrutiny, threw himself back in his chair, a smile of delight played over his lips. He then arose, and turning to Valois, declared the States to be opened.

The monarch, who had been, successively, the chivalric Duke D'Anjou, the feeble King of Poland, the superstitious yet mild sovereign of France, the pedant and man of letters, the rhetorician and versifier, who amused himself with the poets Pibrac and Ronsard, whilst the Queen-mother was watching the growth of the infant League, now a terrible monster, arose with a pale face and agitated mien. He narrated to the States an abstract of his own career; he showed the condition of the kingdom, when Providence had called

upon him to assume the regal sway—he painted the condition and character of each party and faction which had disturbed the peace of his country; and as he dwelt on the arrogance and bigotry of the priesthood—the grasping oppression of the noblesse —the ignorance and monk-led fury of the commonalty, his voice grew louder, his stature more erect, his thoughts bolder, and the style of his harangue more eloquent, satiric, and convincing. Indignation had lent him its power, and placed within his mastery the stored materials of a mind not deficient either in imagination or erudition. The assembly was astonished—the partisans of Guise and the League looked at each other uneasily, apprehensive that the *exposé* of the monarch would rouse a hidden feeling in his favour—the clergy felt abashed, and hung down their heads to conceal the vexation which troubled their hearts, thus laid open by a cunning and skilful hand. He concluded, amid the loud plaudits of his subjects beyond the barrier, and of those within the gallery, an harangue which for eloquence and skilful peroration and detail, had never been approached, far less equalled, by any former scion of royalty.

The silence which ensued was broken by the vehement Archbishop of Lyons, who stung with

rage at the attack on his order, and alarmed at the prospect of returning loyalty, which it might effect, arose, and in a voice discordant and broken by passion, begged that his Majesty would retract words spoken in the heat of discourse; that if the discourse were allowed to go forth to his subjects in its present form, it would be the cause of endless confusion.

"If his Majesty be asked to retract his words, it would have been far better if Monseigneur and his friends, had informed him beforehand what to say!" cried Catherine.

Lyons replied arrogantly that he did not think her Majesty had any right to meddle with the business of the States—that it was contrary to the spirit of the Salique law.

"If such were the spirit of the law," rejoined the Queen, with a look of contempt; "where would have been your rochet? Was it not ourself, as Regent of this kingdom, for his Majesty's lamented brother, who preferred you to your see? If the law allow not our taking share in the councils of the State, your preferment must have been illegal and irregular! We should be sorry—very sorry!" continued Catherine, in a calm satiric tone; "that our good lieges of Lyons were deprived of Monseigneur's holy ministrations!

Even the law itself would be blamed by his flock smarting under their irreparable loss!"

The Archbishop received the rebuke in silence; far otherwise was it with the furious and enthusiastic preacher, Lincestre, who arose in his place behind the prelates, and cried out in a loud voice—

"Glad as a martyr should I be, O Queen! if the earth were to give way beneath the feet of the arch-promoters of heresy—the encouragers of the damnable Calvinists—aye—though I, a poor servant of the church, should not escape from the wicked tie which has bound me to the falling corruption!"

"The simile is not appropriate, father!" said Catherine,—"say, rather, that you were a leech caught from stagnant ponds—that you stuck to the royal monarch of the Louvre until satiated by a rich abbey—but then, full-blooded, you fell away, loathing the giver of the bounty!"

"O! Evil day for France,"—ejaculated the preacher.

"O! Evil day for the honour of French gentlemen, if they allow our presence to be thus insulted," exclaimed Catherine. "Messeigneurs!" continued she, addressing the assembly; "is this your foremost advocate?"

This appeal had the desired effect, and the preacher was silenced. But this skirmishing was not to the taste of the Protector. He resolved to settle the disputed point; and declared that it would accrue to the good of France if his Majesty were permitted to give to the nation his speech, even as it was uttered, without the least alteration, so that all might read their sovereign's mind; the good Catholic taking note with sorrow of the aspersions thrown on those, who stood forward in the defence of their faith; and the heretic gloating over the immunity and sanction which heresy would receive by the discomfiture of its enemies.

"Let France hear the Grand Master's scheme of pacification!" cried Valois, giving to the Protector the opportunity he desired.

The Duke of Guise, who had sat down at the conclusion of his previous remarks, arose at the bidding of Valois, and casting a glance of triumph around the assembly, began an elaborate oration, laying down his premises very calmly, yet increasing in warmth as he proceeded, till having fully strung the hearts of friends in beating unison with his own, he launched out into a bold attack on the policy pursued by the Louvre—artfully, the while, picturing his own conduct, in the colour of a saviour of his country, and of his country's religion.

Having worked up the minds of the deputies by his eloquence to the proper pitch, he proposed that the assembly should agree to an enactment, which alone could bring the nation to a peaceful and happy state, and which consisted of two primary and essential conditions:—that the decrees of the Council of Trent be received by France—and that Henry, Duke of Vendôme, and King of Navarre, be excluded from the succession.

These articles were received by the assembly with loud tokens of assent. The archbishop after exchanging glances with the Protector, arose, and declared the necessity of another condition;—that his Majesty should appoint a successor.

To the dismay of Valois and the Queen-mother, the proposal was received with deafening shouts. But the simple-minded Marquis De Cœuvres, who had listened to the proceedings with great earnestness, now arose to ask the Protector and his clerical coadjutor, whom it was, they desired should be appointed successor. This homely question produced considerable laughter, but the Duke evaded it by saying that he should live to see his Majesty blessed with a noble consort, and he hoped a numerous line of princes; and that the article proposed was only a measure of precaution in case of failure of issue.

"And I hope so too," replied the Marquis, "for I have been at Blois but a short time, yet I have heard from the mouths of many, that an illustrious lady, a friend of yours, Monseigneur, keeps by her a pair of golden scissors, which she declares is to cut into shape his Majesty's tonsure, when he takes the vows."

This allusion to Montpensier created considerable mirth, and many a glance was bent upward to the gallery; but the Duchess was not present.

"How can the King of Navarre be excluded from the succession," said Catherine, when the laughter had subsided, "his right being so strongly based on the oldest law of the kingdom? Ask Monseigneur De Lyons if the Salique law of inheritance is to be violated."

This sarcasm nettled the Archbishop exceedingly; but Guise made a sign to him not to speak, and rising himself, said,—"By these acts can he be excluded!"—and thereupon uttered a long string of charges both civil and religious, the chief of which were rebellion and heresy.

"But how are these to be proved in the absence of the accused?" exclaimed Valois.

"There needs no proof," replied Guise, amid the plaudits of his friends; "every one now present, who fought at Coutras, has evidence sufficient to

condemn him. Who will gainsay the treason and the heresy of the apostate Navarre?"

"I will!" shouted the Count De Grammont, rising in a fury: "I deny his treason! I fought at Coutras, and was grieved that I could not find the Duke of Guise on the field. And, I, now in the name of the Duke De Vendôme, and King of Navarre, and Prince of Bearn, and whatever other titles he may possess—God be praised! he is worthy of them!—protest against the passing of such an unjust law—and moreover, in the name of the King of Navarre, I challenge his accuser to a trial at arms!"

"*Deo volente!*" whispered De Rosny to his friend.

"*Deo volente!*" shouted the Count.

"The King of Navarre is a very prudent man," said Guise, sarcastically, "to stay at home, and send a deputy to fight his battles."

"He shall wield his own lance!" cried De Grammont.

"Monseigneur!" exclaimed the Grand Master, in a tone of sarcastic condescension, "the fourteenth century has been long buried with our ancestors—the stroke of a lance or sword cannot make a good Catholic out of a vile heretic, or even drive out the spirit of rebellion from a disaffected

heart. The King of Navarre will be always the King of Navarre, and nothing higher is he capable of! The honest citizens of France have cast him off long since, and the enactment which we now propose passing, is but an echo of the sentiment which dwells in every true Catholic's breast!"

"For my own part, most illustrious Prince," said the Marquis De Cœuvres, again rising, "I would never obey a heretic on the throne of France; but I think the poor sinful King of Navarre ought to be invited to meet us, before we proceed to exclude him from the succession. Whether we have power to change the law or not, I believe firmly, that if his Majesty were brought from Rochelle, or whatever other abode of heresy he is now dwelling in, and were placed under the tuition of the holy cardinals and bishops now assembled, they would soon induce him to become a good Catholic."

"That old fool serves us more adroitly than all the wisdom of our cabinet," said Catherine in a whisper to her son.

"No better course could be followed than that proposed by Monseigneur the Governor of D'Usson," said Valois aloud. "Let us summon our cousin Navarre to the States."

"And for what!" exclaimed Guise, in an indignant tone:—"Is it, that he may again scandalize our faith by a second apostacy? Did he not profess himself a convert to our holy faith till it suited his purpose to throw off the mask after the death of his late Majesty, who would never have tolerated heresy in his palace? Heresy, as all our holy fathers have inculcated, is a rank poisonous weed that must be rooted out——"

"Is this the way, Monseigneur," asked Catherine, interrupting the Protector of the League, "to heal the wounds of the state?"

A mixed murmur of approbation and vehement disapproval of the royal interruption followed the question of her Majesty; and Guise, who had played the part of a man of moderation long enough to grow tired of the discourse, resolved to put forth his strength, and carry every thing after his own desire.

"That were an office, certainly, befitting your Majesty's ancestor," said he, replying insolently to the proposal of the Queen-mother; "soldiers and gentlemen cannot so deport themselves."

This allusion to the calling of the first of the De Medicis, who had been a Florentine apothecary, galled their proud descendant excessively. She turned pale with rage, but prudence did not

forsake her; and believing that the insult would cause a diversion in her favour, she told the deputies that they had better entertain her son's advice, and summon the King of Navarre, that he might question the Duke of Guise respecting the allegation advanced by the latter. The term 'question' threw the Protector into a fury.

"Ah! Heresy question the true faith!" exclaimed he.

"If at fault you might call in Madame De Sauves to your aid!" cried the Queen-mother, who could no longer forbear giving vent to the anger which his insult had originated.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" chuckled De Cœuvres; "then the story I have heard is true——" but the remainder of the governor's words were lost in the tumult of laughter, which proceeded alike from friend and foe of the arch-leaguer, who now glared upon the assembly with an aspect that indicated the tempest struggling within.

At length, starting up, he stretched forth both his hands towards the assembly with an air of commanding action.

"Am I a mark for insult?" exclaimed he. "Am I a butt for heresy, licentiousness, and atheism to cast their shafts at? Am I the man, O Catholics, whom you have chosen as your leader?

If I be disgraced, is it fit that I retain the title of Protector of your holy Faith? Am I fit to be the representative of the Catholic Church? No! I resign the title! No longer am I your Protector."

With all his fierce impetuosity and untamed ambition, there was a groundwork of prudence and good sense in the mind of the Grand Master of the Palace; up to the present moment, he had dallied with his power, desirous that his ends should be seemingly accomplished rather by the nature of circumstances than his own overt acts or the violence of his partisans; but the remembrance of Catherine's triumph and his own mistake in the affair of the barricades came seasonably to his mind, and dreading lest the subtlety of his enemy should again foil his strong intent, he silenced the cries of his friends; and in a firm voice called upon the secretary Revol to read aloud the articles embracing the exclusion of Navarre from the throne, and the necessity of Valois appointing a successor.

Catherine was but too well convinced that if she suffered these articles to pass the votes of the assembly, that it would only pave the way for the ultimatum of the faction of the League, which was to depose her son, and shut him up in a monastery, in order to make room for their idol. There re-

mained, however, but one mode of escaping these fatal laws, in an assembly, the majority of which was prepared to vote for any measure which the chief of the League proposed. She whispered a few words to Valois.

No sooner had Revol ceased reading the articles, than the king stepped forward, and adjourned the States, allowing them an interval of four days' rest.

This communication fell like a thunderbolt on the Protector, in his career of triumph; he fairly staggered, and caught hold of the chair for support, but immediately recovering his presence of mind, he exclaimed in a loud voice, "France cannot consent to the adjournment!"

"France requires that the Grand Master should marshal the way home to the Palace of his sovereign!" replied Valois with look and speech of more kingly dignity than had ever been witnessed in him.

The Grand Master, however, took no heed of the duties of his office, but descended from the dais, and commenced an earnest conversation with the Cardinals and dignitaries of the church; whilst the deputies of the three estates, talking all together, and at once, stamping, swearing, each waving his cap and gesticulating after the fashion of

his countrymen, which mingling with the vocifera-tions of five hundred or more of brethren, gave the spectators in the gallery a more picturesque image of the confusion at Babel, than that which was figured on the tapestry on the wall behind the pillars.

Valois and his royal parent did not hold it safe to pass through the crowd of their excited enemies; with the assistance of the gentlemen of the guard, they descended from the dais in the rear, and sought a joyful egress from the assembly by winding round the barrier among the strangers and townsmen.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Ah, noble prince! how oft have I behelde
Thee mounted on thy fierce and trampling stede,
Shining in armour bright before the tilt,
And with thy mistresse sleve tied on thy helme,
And charge thy staffe, to please thy ladies' eye,
That bowed the head peece of thy friendly foe!
How oft in armes on horse to bend the mace,
How oft in armes on foot to breake the sworde,
Which never now these eyes may see againe.

FERREX AND PORREX.

No description could faithfully depict the rage of Montpensier when her brother returned to his palace, and acquainted her with the untoward conclusion of the meeting of the States. Although the Protector, with circumstantial minuteness, detailed the proceedings of the assembly, and explained the obvious impossibility of forcing the States to act in violation of the laws on which hung their very existence—that it was worse than useless for the deputies to attempt passing an

enactment after the assembly had been prorogued, and their existence consequently in abeyance till the ensuing Saturday—still Madame Montpensier, could not believe otherwise, than that her brother had committed another fatal error of courtesy or mistaken honour. She awaited with impatience the arrival of the Archbishop of Lyons, who came with the Count De Brissac, an influential Leaguer, and several others of equal note, to condole with the Duke on his disappointment, and to take counsel together, and agree on a course of action which might prevent a repetition of the same disaster.

To the Archbishop, who was known to be a man of uncompromising temper, and not likely to excuse the Duke for any lapse of action, she listened with attention, and fortunately for the domestic peace of the Protector, became at length convinced that he had at least carried his policy as far as his friends judged prudent.

"Father," exclaimed she, "I would have held the monkish king in the chair! did I not receive from the mouths of as many as four-fifths of the deputies, their promise to adopt any measure which might come either from yourself or my brother? And for men, who account themselves the wisest and strongest in France to submit to

such a creature as the thing which yet holds in its hands the sceptre of the kingdom!"

When a woman like Montpensier, of violent temper, lofty ambition, and implacable hatred, meddles in political affairs, she cannot reconcile to her own daring policy the caution and apparent pusillanimity of conduct which characterizes the proceedings of men even as ambitious and courageous as herself. When a page or domestic offends her, she inflicts summary vengeance—when a guest renders himself obnoxious, instant banishment is his lot—no where in her own natural sphere does she meet with let or hindrance to the accomplishment of her desires. But it is otherwise with statesmen and political chiefs, who, in aiming a blow at the influence or existence of their rivals, have to study their own reputation together with a cautious approach to, and passage through, the moral defences which surround their victim.

"Wait, daughter, but four days longer," said the churchman, laying his fingers on her arm, "and we will escort you in triumph to the Chateau De Blois! Your brother, through the power of the Church, and the good-will of pious Catholics, is King of Paris already. Though he marches not as quickly as a woman's thoughts, yet he never loses the grasp of what he has once seized. Neither

does his ally, the Church, move after the fashion of a crab, though many foolish men attempt to say, that the sprinkling of hellish doctrines which has of late fallen on Christendom, will deprive the Church of much of her vitality. While the poisonous weed is nurtured humbly it is unnoticed, but when it makes head against its neighbour ——Ah! you laugh, daughter!—you understand me. I do assure you, Madame, that I am much pleased with the success of the heretic, Navarre —his pretensions will not droop till the friends of the Church do, in their indignation, exterminate the Calvinists root and branch from out of the soil of France. Happy am I, that the cunning Queen-mother had courage to invite her Huguenot friends. There has just arrived another at the chateau—the much talked of Baron De Nevailles—and wondrous to relate—he is discovered to be none other than Villa Franca, the lost minion of the royal descendant of apothecaries! See daughter what disasters befal our enemies! to place, forsooth, her confidence in an enemy unwittingly."

"My brother almost died of laughter at the relation of Madame De Sauves, who reported to him the arrival of the young man," said Montpensier smiling.—"Poor Catherine! I wish I had

been present when they met, though she wanted not the presence of an enemy to add to her mortification."

It had been the custom of Guise and the principal Leaguers, for some time previous to the assembly of the States, to attend daily at the King's council-chamber, that they might confer with his secretaries and advisers, or if his Majesty were so disposed, with himself. No good had resulted from these conferences, neither was it intended by the Protector, that any other effect should attend them, than a continuance of his reputation for moderation and desire of healing the wounds of the state.

Notwithstanding the angry termination of the meeting of the States, the subsequent morning saw the Duke, as usual, attended by a train of gentlemen, repair to the chateau to hear fresh proposals, and to utter replies, as little likely to bring about peace as their precursors of the former week. Wednesday morning witnessed the same duplicity; and the conference on Thursday was attended with but little variation, save that at the foot of the grand staircase in the chateau, the Duke was solicited by a captain of his Majesty's guard and a number of the soldiers, to interest himself for the men, who, owing to the wretched

state of the royal finances, were in great distress, on account of their families, having received no pay for many months; and as the captain declared, Monseigneur having great weight with his Majesty and the council, a word from him would do much for men who had often attended his footsteps, and obeyed his commands in happier times. Guise, being aware of the truth of what they averred, promised to recommend their case to the council above.

On his return from the council, Montpensier in great alarm related a report which had been mysteriously circulating in the city; and which, if true, indicated a hostile attempt on his life by the agents of the king.

From whence the report had originated, or by whom set afloat, was equally unknown; but the noxious whisper had spread from mouth to mouth, till it had created an atmosphere of alarm and suspicion. The Duchess conjured her brother to stay away from the council on the morrow, as his visit to the chateau was the only opportunity open to his enemies to attack him with advantage. Guise, who was neither influenced by fear, nor above the exercise of prudential caution, replied, that he would be guided by his friends, who were to meet on the morrow, being Friday morning,

and repair with him in great show and state to the Palace to attend, for the last time, the morning conference.

"My own opinion, and you know, Catherine," said he similing, "that I am not fool-hardy, is, that the whisper is set afloat by the Court, as its last chance, in order to drive me from Blois—or to prevent me attending the States. If the intent were true, your namesake would have taken excellent care to prevent her resolve from travelling about the city as widely as an ordinary matter of scandal."

On entering his chamber, he beheld a sealed letter lying for his perusal; it was to the same purport as the report which his sister had recounted; and it concluded by warning him to take especial care of his life, as Valois meditated depriving him of it.

"He durst not," exclaimed the Duke, writing these words on the letter and replacing it on the table, for the observation of those who had deposited it there; that they might become aware of the discredit he attached to the communication.

The next morning brought with it a crowd of friends anxious to embody themselves among the train which daily accompanied him to the Palace.

To the most confidential of these, he spoke of the hostile rumour which had got abroad, and asked their opinions concerning it. The Count De Brissac advised him to refrain from trusting himself in the power of his enemies; the preacher Lincestre followed on the same side; but the Archbishop laughed at the affair as a device of the enemy.

During the discussion, the Duke De Mayenne, brother of Guise and Montpensier, and a soldier of great promise recently returned from Italy, equalled only in military reputation by his statesmanlike sagacity and penetration, entered the saloon where the Leaguers were assembled. Upon being questioned as to the degree of credit which ought to be attached to the suspicious whisper, he, without previous communication with the Archbishop, spoke to nearly the same effect as the prelate:—

"Have you not constantly perceived," said he "the balancing, cautious policy of Catherine? Do we not know for a certainty, as far indeed as a human being's heart can be known, that the Queen-mother is bitterly inimical—I would even say, conscientiously inimical—to the Huguenots, and only favours them that they may hang on France as a counterpoise to our power? Has she taken one

decided step either on one side or the other, since the death of our friend Charles? Has it not been her constant aim to cajole the Huguenots—to allow us to grin at them through our barred iron—and behold! when lance is in rest, and spur in horse's flank—out steps the gentle lady of the Louvre, and places herself between us and our holy revenge? Is this the woman to bring down on her head the severest indignation, and the most deadly revenge which the nation would exact, were its Protector and favourite violently cut off? For certain, the rumour flew from the Palace; and a pretty *ruse de guerre* it is. Will my brother Henry mount horse for Paris, and leave the wily lady to triumph to-morrow on the steps of the dais—or will he go with us to the council-chamber, and put our lady in despair of a new stratagem?"

"In God's name, we will go to council, brother," exclaimed Guise with a firm voice.

The cortege had scarcely departed an hour, ere Montpensier, who had been present at the discussion, and was, if not convinced, at least silenced by the arguments of her brother and the Archbishop, was informed, that a peasant desired to speak to her on private business; but that he would not communicate what he was in quest of to others.

"Then let him enter," said the masculine Princess, who feared neither peasant or prince.

The Duchess saw enter a tall thin wild looking being with a grin on his wrinkled countenance, which, however, she could not interpret either into pleasure, fear, or surprise.

"Your name, *bon homme*, if you have one?" said Montpensier, on beholding the peasant looking about like one bewildered.

"Is the Duke here—may I not speak to such a great Prince?" exclaimed the peasant, seemingly inclined to treat the Duchess with as little attention as if she were a serving-woman.

The page who followed him into the chamber, explained to the Duchess that he had told the man that Monseigneur had left the hotel—that he had in his possession a letter for the Duke, but would not give it up; but which he thought, Madame might extract from him. Madame indignantly demanded why they had not taken away the letter, and beaten the insolent *vilain* till he could not stand; but the page replied, that they were obliged to deal cunningly, for he was very strong, and had plucked up Jean, and thrown him on a cornice projecting over the gateway.

The lady hearing this account of his prowess, though it prudent to deal cunningly also; and

told the peasant, who was looking about as if he suspected the Duke were hidden somewhere, that the Protector was at the King's palace, and that if he had any letter for him, she, being his sister, would take care of it.

It was our old friend, Louis Le Lupin, who had been thus introduced into the presence of Montpensier; and upon hearing what the Duchess said, the suspicion which he had entertained that there was a conspiracy among the household to prevent him seeing and speaking to his great friend, to whom he had of yore, rendered such important services, was wholly dissipated; and he presented the letter to *Madame* without further solicitation.

"And from whom came this?" asked the lady.

"From Father Antoine, of the convent of the holy Capuchins in the king's garden," replied Louis, in a tone of affected importance.

"Then it is on the business of our holy League," exclaimed Montpensier, opening the letter.

It was a note of warning from the Capuchin, who, from his proximity to the palace, had observed that the gardens were that morning patrolled by the soldiers of the guard; and that several sentinels were lodged in the temple facing the convent. This unusual circumstance, the holy father de-

clared was indicative of threatened evil; and he had, therefore, taken the precaution to advertise Monseigneur, the Duke, of the fact by the hands of the woodman, Louis Le Lupin, a sincere servant of the church, and trustworthy to the extent of his ability. Father Antoine apologized for not coming in person on account of the system of espionage which *Madame*, the Queen-mother, had directed to be observed towards the inmates of the convent.

"May the powers of hell seize both mother and son!" exclaimed Montpensier, when she had finished the perusal of this alarming epistle.

Her quick resolve was instantly put in execution. Commanding the page to keep secret her departure, she hastily left the hotel accompanied by Louis, whom she promised should both see and speak to his idol, the Duke. It was the custom for the friends of her brother, while he was with Valois and the cabinet, to await in the court of the castle, or on the landing of the staircase, till he came out of the council-chamber. Montpensier determined, so soon as she reached the palace, to alarm her friends—force an entry into the council—and bear away her brother out of the fangs of his enemies. That the Duchess might not be recognised as she passed along the streets, she put on her mask, and

by this means reached the chateau unobserved; the woodman full of pride and vanity striding after her with feet that scarcely seemed to touch the earth, so transported was he with the honour which awaited him.

"I cannot believe that that drivelling, foolish woman, who has been now two days on a bed of sickness, will attempt aught against *Henri!*" muttered Madame to herself, as she prepared to enter the court of the palace.

But we must now return to the Protector.

Accompanied by his brother, Mayenne, whose person and character will be the subject of future comment, the Count De Brissac, the Archbishop, Colonel St. Paul, and many others, of various rank and station, the Duke of Guise moved onward to the palace, amid the applause of the deputies congregated to do honour to his progress. The inhabitants of Blois did not join in the manifestations of delight evinced by his friends; on the contrary, they prided themselves on their loyalty—on the reputation which their city had acquired as the favourite residence of kings—and on the purity of their dialect, which they attributed to the frequent sojourn of the court.

"How different in feeling are the artisans and dial-makers of Blois from our good citizens of

Paris!" exclaimed De Mayenne, addressing his brother, whom he observed to have become of a sudden dispirited.

"Their silence is, indeed, ominous to one who has fed on the breath of popularity like myself!" replied the Protector, in a gloomy tone of voice.

"Come! Come! Henri!" rejoined De Mayenne; "repeat the Roman's text, *odi profanum vulgus* for once! And let us again frighten the silly Valois ere we withdraw the chair from beneath him!"

They had now arrived at the palace, and were received by the ushers and officers of the guard with the honour befitting their rank.

At the head of the principal staircase of the chateau, there was a landing which served the purpose of an ante-room to the council-chamber. This latter apartment on ordinary occasions was open to the passage of the courtiers, but on council-days, none were admitted save those, who had the privilege of *entrée* to the cabinet. Upon entering the council-room from the landing place, the spectator beheld a door on the right hand, situated at the extremity of this spacious apartment; it opened into a tapestried chamber, or rather corridor; on the left was his Majesty's wardrobe room, and on the opposite side, the entrance to the

royal closet; the doors of both were concealed behind the tapestry.

But we are anticipating the progress of the Duke, who was now only at the foot of the staircase. Here he was again accosted by the captain of the guard and his men; and he repeated his promise of interceding with the Secretaries of State for the relief of their necessities.

"This staircase and the landing above," said Guise to his friends, "may be truly called the hall of suppliants! Every one who has a suit to forward —or an object to gain—makes it his business to way-lay the unfortunate man who happens to be of the council."

"The suppliants whom you have just spoken to," rejoined De Mayenne; "are more numerous than all the others—and they come in state too—with cuirass as bright as glass."

"Some one else pays for the polish," said Guise, laughing; "the royal treasury, I am sure, cannot afford it, unless *Madame*, the mother of kings, has pawned her jewels."

Only Guise, the Archbishop, De Brissac, and De Mayenne, were allowed to enter the council-chamber, the door of which was held by the guard of the king; the others dispersed themselves on

the staircase, and loitered about the corridors, or wherever they listed.

Scarcely had the Protector with his associates entered the hall, than he was seized with a shivering fit, and led to the fire-place, glowing with embers, for the autumn had set in cold. He, however, speedily recovered, and being ashamed of his weakness, began to talk earnestly with the Secretary Beaulieu, M. De Villeroi, now somewhat in disgrace with Valois, and Alphonso De Corso, the Italian.

As the Duke De Mayenne had for the first time done himself, or his Majesty, the honour of attending the daily conference, Valois, in order to mark with distinction his visit, admitted him to the royal closet in preference to his more illustrious brother.

During his absence the arch-leaguer endeavoured to assume his wonted confidence, but in vain; there was something out of order in either body or mind which he could not account for; and though he joined apparently in the mirth of the Sieur De Beaulieu, who was jesting on the contents of a letter which he had received, and which reported that the Huguenot Viscount De Turenne was laying close siege to the sister of the late Duke of

Bouillon, and heiress of his estates and principality, yet was the Protector far from feeling a quietude of mind.

From this disagreeable state he was relieved by the re-appearance of Charles De Mayenne, accompanied by the Secretary Revol, who stated his Majesty's request that he should repair to the closet.

"Is her Majesty there?" asked Guise.

"She has been ill of the gout these two days past, and cannot yet stir from her bed!" said De Mayenne, in a whisper to his brother.

Hereupon the Protector, bowing with his usual affability to the council, and to his own friends, disappeared by the door leading to the closet, which was closed after him, and locked by the usher in waiting on the council.

He found himself in the corridor communicating with the royal closet; a group of pages seated on a bench, and whose faces were familiar to him, arose on his entrance, as it were in salutation.

Accustomed daily to the same office, he raised the tapestry, and was about to lay his hand on the door of the closet, when one of the pages drew his poniard, and raising it on high, drove it with all his strength into the breast of the victim; its dreadful

plunge was the signal for his comrades to follow the example. The poor Leaguer uttered not a word—but heaved a sigh so profound that it made tremble and to stand aghast all the guilty wretches whose steel was bedewed with his illustrious blood.

Notwithstanding the wound which his body had received, the fiery soul of the Duke was not yet overpowered, and driven from its tenement; and though the assassins pressed upon him, and endeavoured to sway him to the floor, he burst from their deadly embrace, and staggered towards the door of the council-chamber.

De Lognac, a royal page, who had not hitherto used his weapon, but stricken with terror at the vibrating frame of the Protector, had unconsciously dropped on one knee—now seeing the Duke approach with the aspect of a demon—with eyes starting from their sockets, arms extended and fists clenched in agony, and as it were about to wreak a dying vengeance on the kneeling page—in his alarm thrust forth his sheathed sword in defence; onward came the threatening form of the Leaguer, his breast and the sword met in contact, and he was precipitated to the floor by the simple, almost unconscious effort of the

page. The Protector fell on the carpet nerveless,—lifeless, expiring immediately without a struggle.

But the disturbance had been heard in the council-chamber—the leaguers rushed wildly from their seats—and hurried to the door, anticipating but too justly the fate of their leader. It was locked, and the usher refused to surrender the key; but the agonized brother of the Protector, seizing the officer, dashed him against the wall—the key was plucked from his grasp—the door opened—and De Mayenne rushed in to behold the lifeless body of his brother;—alone on the floor—for the coward assassins had sought refuge in the closet of guilty royalty.

At this instant a scuffle was heard on the landing place—a shout of defiance mingled with a woman's scream—the strong door of the council-chamber sprung open with a crash—and Louis Le Lupin pierced with wounds fell over the threshold.

Montpensier, with the countenance and wild gesture of a fury—brandishing the steel which she had snatched from a feeble owner—and followed by many of the Leaguers, strode over the dying peasant, and rushed into the corridor.

"Who has done this frightful deed?" exclaimed the petrified preacher Lincestre.

"It was I—I!" gasped forth Charles De Mayenne, full of remorse for his fatal advice; and sunk down upon the body of his slaughtered brother.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Stand forth, transform'd Antonio, fully mued
From brown soar feathers of dull yeomanry,
To th' glorious bloom of gentry; prune yourself sleek;
Swear boldly y' are the man you represent,
To all that dare deny it.

ALBUMAZAR.

THUS terminated the proud career of the Protector of the League; and if the destiny of a man be estimated simply by the influence which he exercised over the affairs of his country, without regard either to the duration of his life, the happiness or misery which accrued to his lot, or the principles which guided his conduct, we may pronounce *Henri de Lorraine* to have been one of the most brilliant stars which ever illuminated the political firmament of the kingdom of France.

He died ignominiously, but he fell like a hero, striking terror into his coward enemies; even as the lion circumvented by base toils falls a sacrifice

to a pigmy power, which scarcely dares approach the monarch of the forest, even while breathing forth his mighty heart.

To Valois must be ascribed the sole design of this stroke of expediency; neither Catherine, nor De Biron, nor any of the chief personages of the kingdom, had been consulted by the determined monarch; he worked alone in his scheme of release; and when the opportunity for executing his resolve was at hand, he found great difficulty in procuring the necessary aid for its accomplishment; and to the number of the inferior officers of the household whom he was forced to apply to, ere he could induce any of them to become assassins, must be ascribed the warnings which smote ineffectually the ear of the Protector.

The descendant of St. Louis listened with suspended breath and trembling frame till the heavy fall of his rival announced the conclusion of the tragedy.

Fearful of meeting the dying gaze of his murdered enemy, he escaped from the closet by a back staircase which led to the quarter of the Palace occupied by the Queen-mother, who was stretched on a bed of sickness, unable to controul the actions of her son, or even to listen to his misdoings.

To the chamber of his sick parent, he fled, trembling yet rejoicing, as one who has set fire to a train, yet fears its explosion. The conference which ensued was but short, for the Queen-mother was writhing with pain. Upon her son being conducted to her bed-side, he said in a tone of exultation, yet still tremulously, from the agitated nerves of his coward frame—

"Madame! The King of Paris lies dead at the door of my closet—I am now King of all France!"

"Have a care, Henri!" replied Catherine, her features convulsed with the violent effects of the disease, "that you be not very soon king of nothing!"

She could speak no more; and Valois, deprived of the advice or consolation of his parent—his ears still haunted with the sounds of death, although he had fled from the guilty spot—in his distraction sought the chamber of the Baron De Nevailles, whom he found alone; and to whom he related, in a hurried trembling voice, the catastrophe which had just occurred, extenuating his own conduct in the execution of the deed of slaughter.

"Either he or ourself must have fallen," said the unhappy monarch, "France could not be subject to two rulers! Not only yourself, Baron, but

every man who has eyes to look around beyond his own interests, must have seen that the Leaguer aimed at nothing less than the destruction of ourself and the sovereignty of the house of Valois! If ever King had cause to commit an act of violence, such was my condition!"

"Your Majesty was indeed driven from the Palace of your ancestors," said the Baron.

"And yet, De Nevailles," rejoined Valois, "I have sinned deeply—my hands are stained with blood—I feel myself doomed! But hear me, Heaven!" continued the weak yet rash Prince, dropping on his knees,—"give me strength to expiate my crime in penance! Often have I wished to visit Palestine—to walk humbly over the sacred ground on which my Redeemer tarried during his earthly sojourn!"——

What further the King spoke was uttered in a tone inaudible to the Baron; but suddenly starting up, the monarch exclaimed,—

"Yes! De Nevailles! Ourself and the penitential brethren whose exercises you have witnessed, shall embark with me for a pilgrimage to Mount Carmel. I will order a ship to be ready at Marseilles."

"What! and leave the Leaguers to wreak their revenge on a sick parent guiltless of the crime!"

cried the Baron. "The chief of an illustrious house to forsake the home of his ancestors when destructive vengeance hovers over the roof! Doubtless, Sire, you have committed a grievous crime—and do you imagine that Heaven will wipe away the offence for a prayer or two, or a pleasant jaunt to the Levant? But just now your Majesty confessed to me that you did evil to bring about good. If you have had courage to perform the guilty portion of your labour, why forsake the accomplishment of what ought to be the immediate step to regain peace of mind? Look, Sire, tot he condition of your kingdom. Put yourself at the head of your army—call together the nobles who yet remain faithful to your house—vanquish the many evils of that serpent, whose head only has been bruised! Let peace reign once more in France, and discord cease between its sons—and may the peasant at his cheerful labour—the merchant at his industrious board—and the noble, whose lands are free from ravage, pray to Heaven to forgive their monarch for the sin he has committed."

"This is not the language of a heretic!" exclaimed the reviving monarch.

"The light from Heaven shines on all Christians equally," said De Nevailles; "but there are some men who look upon their neighbour, and

see only the dark shadow which trails behind—and this, through malice or ignorance, they call heresy!"

At this moment the door of the apartment was flung open, and De Rosny entered with eager steps and excited features.

"It is as I predicted, De Nevailles," exclaimed the Huguenot, without noticing the King,—"Guise is slain—and the Leaguers are wheeling about like a disturbed rookery!"

"The more is my guilt!" cried Valois.

De Rosny was at first startled, but instantly recovering himself, said, "Guilt it certainly is to destroy the chief, and suffer the accomplices to escape! Does your Majesty suppose that the death of one man will root out the fibres of rebellion which have clung so deeply in the soil? Why give the Protector of the League against your life to the worms, and suffer that she-dragon Montpensier—the quick soldier De Mayenne—and the haughty Count de Brissac to career at large—to escape from your Majesty's palace, that they may travel over the land, breathing a noxious vapour which will, in the end, suffocate you?"

"What! add fresh horrors to the work of death?" cried the distracted Prince.

"No, prevent them!" rejoined De Rosny,

stretching forth his arm; "imprison those who will make the land a pestilential region of death. What say you, Baron De Nevailles?"

"It would be only an act of prudence to order into confinement the chief Leaguers," replied De Nevailles, addressing his Majesty.

The advice was taken—but it was too late; the Leaguers had escaped from the palace, leaving the dead body of the peasant Louis le Lupin, who died in the service of his illustrious friend; and who was interred in the cemetery of the Capuchins in the King's garden.

When Montpensier quitted the Chateau de Blois she knew no other object than instant revenge; but the friends of her brother, and the Deputies, were panic struck at the fate which had overtaken their leader; in vain did the haughty and violent Duchess attempt to rally their courage: they shrunk away from the struggle, and fled from Blois as though they dreaded, in their own persons, a similar catastrophe to that of the Protector. Thus deserted and exposed to the order for their arrest, which Valois had issued, and of which timely information was conveyed to them by their friends in the palace, Montpensier, with the Duke de Mayenne, and his friends, escaped quickly to Paris, resolved to make that city the *point d'appui* of a

power which should speedily overturn their cruel enemy.

The following day, which was to witness the second meeting of the States, saw only a deserted city; all had fled to their homes, or to a place of refuge, save the gentlemen attached to the party of the King; and many of these were undetermined whether to stay or quit the side of a monarch who had acted so outrageously.

Valois being left to the bias of his own judgment, saw a prospect of ultimate safety only by a union with the Huguenots; and he accordingly proposed to them more advantageous articles of alliance, than had been offered by the Queen-mother. During the negociation, De Rosny urged the King of Navarre, still lying *perdu* at the chateau, and enjoying the sweet delight of stolen interviews with Gabrielle, that he should throw off his disguise, and encourage Valois by his presence; but in this matter, the hero of Coutras was more cautious than even his subtle counsellor; he was indeed afraid of making himself known until he felt certain that the Queen-mother would not take advantage of his unprotected person; he dreaded lest she should arouse herself from her bed of sickness, and bind him once more in her cruel chains of thraldom.

But when the Huguenot forces under the Duke de la Tremouïlle and the Sieur de Vivans arrived at the gates of Blois, Navarre threw off his disguise, put on his military harness, and went out to join his brave army. Valois visited the encampment of the Huguenots the day after their arrival, and in the tent of the Bourbon signed the articles of alliance, for which De Rosny and his coadjutors had been struggling so hardly to bring about.

Meanwhile the flames of civil discord were blazing in every province of the kingdom; the leaguer buckled on his armour to encounter the adherent of royalty, and the heretic—now joined, as the Catholics declared, in an unholy and unnatural union. Paris was entirely devoted to the Leaguers; the Duke de Mayenne declared Lieutenant-General of the Forces of Catholic France; while under his control reigned the illustrious Council of Sixteen.

To regain the capital, and crush the faction which occupied its defences, the two monarchs resolved to march with their forces, and lay siege to the city; and although the winter had commenced, they resolved that the season's difference should not impede their labours till Paris was their own.

It was a strange, though a noble, sight for the

citizens of Blois to witness the junction of Huguenots and Catholics; to behold Marshal De Biron, who had taken a farewell of the dying Queen, and harnessed himself for the struggle, now leading to the field the soldiers who had closed in mortal combat at Coutras.

For the Baron de Nevailles, however, a far different office was assigned: he did not join the armies, nor was he present at the siege of Paris—a work of toil and trouble, as the chief labour of the besiegers lay in a continual endeavour to stop supplies from entering the city to the relief of the famishing inhabitants.

But we are anticipating the progress of our narrative; and must return to Blois, to the chamber of the dying Queen, beside whose couch stood Madame D'Usez and the Baron de Nevailles. After a colloquy of trifling import to our readers, Catherine, in a feeble voice said—

"I have sent for you, Baron, that you may convey to my daughter, the Queen of Navarre, my forgiveness of her desertion;—it is not meet that I should die estranged from my own family, while France looks so coldly on us;—and say, that this letter, which the cordelier has written at my dictation, will ease her of all her anxiety;—and give her this advice—to employ Roquelaure

only in affairs where kindness, as the world names it, may be expected—he is a mere foolish creature, and could never have wrought upon me to relax in her favour, had not a strong necessity existed, or, as it now happens, the approach of a visitor, who comes but once in our life—I feel already the cold finger of the angel of death."

D'Usez whispered to the Baron that Roquelaure had administered to her the last rites of the Church.

"I have been irregular in my actions," said Catherine, "yet I have faith in forgiveness, forasmuch as my whole life has been consecrated to the extinguishing of heresy—and preserving my subjects from destroying each other like savages."

"I do assure your Majesty," said the Baron, "that a pure and holy faith reigns in the hearts of the Huguenots, and I conjure you by the Holy Being whom you have no fear to meet, and who has been kind to us, whom you have persecuted with severity, to think of the Reformed faith as the creed and worship of pious men."

"Who have burnt and laid waste the Catholic churches and lands—destroyed the founts of worship of their parent faith—and set themselves up as superior to the holiest authorities of Christianity?"

This was uttered by the Queen in a quick tone, and with an energy quite unexpected.

De Nevailles replied, that both sects had been violent, and had mutual cause to accuse each other of sacrilege;—but Catherine, roused by the contradiction, exclaimed that the Huguenots worshipped nature instead of the power of the Author of nature—that they discarded all spiritualities and warnings,—omens sent from above to warn a sinful race,—and divine tokens of assent for the encouragement of the devout;—that these holy influences were despised by the Calvinistic doctors, and nothing out of the ordinary routine of nature believed.

The conversation was interrupted by De Miron.

"Another fool!" murmured the Queen, as she heard the solemn step of the physician.

De Miron inquired of his patient how she had felt since his absence.

"Worse!" replied Catherine.

"Your Majesty ought to have felt better, from the state I left you in—what nourishment has your Majesty taken?"

"Wine," said the Queen.

"Wine!" ejaculated De Miron. "*Mon Dieu!* Wine!" and grinding his teeth with rage, he

turned to D'Usez, and inquired of her, who had advised her Majesty to take such poison.

"Father Roquelaure," said Catherine, to save Madame the perplexity of an answer.

"Holy apostles! Father Roquelaure! wine in such a case," cried the enraged physician, forgetful that he was in a sick room:—"those cursed monks ever pretend to be doctors of medicine, and yet not one of them is fit to dress a bruise on an ass's hoof! St. Martin! Father Roquelaure is the greatest fool between this city and Paris! *Mon Dieu!*"

"So I said but just now to M. De Nevailles!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Then I will send for Father Roquelaure to come hither," rejoined the physician—and he gave orders to that effect.

"When the footsteps of the cordelier were heard at the door, De Miron stepped aside, and Roquelaure advancing to the foot of the couch, said——

"Your Majesty, I hope, feels much quieter—and more at peace, since the service I administered——"

But the monk was interrupted by an unintelligible exclamation which burst from the physician. The cordelier turned round, but seeing only Madame D'Usez in the direction of the sound, at

once concluded that it proceeded from her; and resumed his former position. The Duchess looked scornfully at the idea that she could be the parent of such a noise—nor was she much appeased at meeting the eyes of De Nevailles, who guessed her thoughts.

"Your Majesty, I hope, feels calmer," continued Roquelaure, "such danger as you were in, never permits us to delay that holy prescription, which St. Chrysostom has commanded us to——"

"Holy apostles!" exclaimed De Miron bursting from his concealment, "St. Chrysostom! what have you done?"

"If it were not for these simple creatures which swarm in the palace, and heaven knows, every where, my illness would be misery, and beyond endurance," murmured the Queen in a whisper to De Nevailles.

A word from the monk and the excited fancy of De Miron was cooled—he saw his mistake, and begged forgiveness.

A few days after this interview, the Baron was ascending the steep causeway of D'Usson, although the kingdom was in a most distracted state—the Queen-mother dying—her son and his new colleague at war with a faction which held Paris, Rouen and the chief cities of France under their

sway—yet De Nevailles felt a happiness to which he had long been a stranger. He was the bearer of a sealed packet, which, he felt certain, would disclose the history of Emilie, to whom he was now returning a penitent lover, anxious to efface every trace of displeasure from her brow, and willing to undergo the strictest penance which his wandering fancy merited.

He was received by the Queen of Navarre in every way befitting a grateful Princess, desirous of honouring the man who had done her service. To her lively acknowledgments, the Baron replied, that he was the messenger of both joy and sorrow; that he sincerely regretted that the reconciliation with her illustrious parent, would in all probability be quickly terminated by her departure from the sphere of her energies and her triumphs. Hereupon he presented the letter which Catherine had transmitted as a legacy to her daughter.

Although Margaret had no great reason to be pleased with the bearing of the Queen-mother's policy towards herself; yet she could not peruse the sentiments of affection, which her Majesty expressed towards her, without being sensibly affected at the idea of her loss. But Catherine had not contented herself with bare words; in the same inclosure with the letter was a grant from

Valois, confirming his sister in the possession of D'Usson during her life; to be held as an inadequate compensation for the loss of her father's bequest.

"We may thank you, Baron, for the golden fruit of this letter of her Majesty," exclaimed Margaret;—"yet the possession of D'Usson is as nought compared with the remission of our oath of secrecy respecting the destiny of Mademoiselle."

"You do the Queen of France injustice," replied De Nevailles;—"it was her own act, springing from her own unsolicited impulse. But I pray your Majesty to remember, that D'Usson is to me the end of a weary pilgrimage—a shrine before which I must appear in a garb of penitence."

"I will use my intercession," rejoined the Queen of Navarre, smiling at the figurative language of De Nevailles, "that your penance be not beyond endurance."

To describe the meeting between Emilie and her diplomatic hero is fairly beyond our power; had we selected from the hints, memoranda, and reminiscences of the Baron, and arranged them in harmonious order, we might have presented the reader with a faint outline of the pleadings of Monseigneur; the gentle upbraidings, followed

by the eloquent silence of a heart forgiving and forgetting; but the interviews of lovers are of more interest to themselves than their friends; and grow tiresome and extravagant to the ears of readers, whose hearts beat not in unison with their own.

But that portion of the conversation which related to the mystery of which Catherine had removed the seal, must not be forgotten. To the astonishment of the Baron, he heard from her sweet lips, that Emilie claimed the Queen of Navarre as her parent; that she was the offspring of a secret marriage with the Count De Ligny, who had been killed in an encounter with a gentleman only a few months previous to the arrival of the King of Navarre at Paris, whither he had been invited by the Queen of France to receive the hand of her daughter. Catherine had only discovered the marriage on proposing to Margaret that she should accept the young Bourbon Prince of Bearn as a husband—an offer which the proud beauty rejected with contempt—but from which, through the importunities of her mother and Charles her brother, she could only escape by confessing her marriage with the Count. The politic Queen and her no less crafty son, who had only seized the idea of the Princess's marriage as a means

of bringing together the Huguenots within their power, in a vast shoal to be immolated at one stroke, were excessively disconcerted with the frustration of their scheme. Whether De Ligny met his death otherwise than by an unpremeditated recontre, the Queen of Navarre could never learn; but his fate wore a suspicious aspect in her eyes, which the subsequent conduct and violent temper of her brother did not diminish. At any rate, the obstacle to her union with the King of Navarre, was violently and abruptly removed; and Catherine and her son were full of joy at the event.

Emilie had been brought up secretly by her father at a chateau in the environs of Paris, to which Margaret resorted as often as opportunity offered. But upon the death of the Count, his daughter was removed by the orders of Catherine, and placed under the care of an ancient lady who had been formerly attached to the court. In spite of the remonstrances which Margaret made to the Queen-mother, the next of kin to De Ligny entered upon possession of the estate, to the entire exclusion of his daughter. This was exactly what the Queen of France desired; to her daughter she only replied in a jeering tone—

"And so you would have the Church of Notre

Dame exhibit the august spectacle of the marriage of the widow of Count De Ligny with the King of Navarre! No, no! Margaret—though you have a head only for new dances and dresses—yet I must think and act for the welfare of our family and the kingdom!"

The reluctant marriage we have already related —the dispensation of St. Bartholomew and its fearful records of blood is known to our readers. Navarre was saved from slaughter through a fear of the ill-report which the house of Valois would have acquired even with the Catholic Princes of Europe, by the slaughter of Margaret's consort.

When the policy of Catherine grew milder, and she no longer resorted to the cruel means of silencing her domestic foes, which had been found so congenial to the temperament of Charles, the youthful Emilie was admitted to visit her parent at the Louvre; a freedom, which paved the way for a constant residence there. This privilege, however, was obtained only by Margaret and her daughter binding themselves never to disclose the secret of Emilie's rank, unless with her Majesty's consent. Save Valois, the only individual acquainted with the marriage and its history, was Roquelaure the Queen of Navarre's confessor.

But notwithstanding the caution observed by

Margaret and her fair offspring, the Queen daily trembled lest the birth of Emilie should be discovered; and the event turned to a political account against herself.

To prevent this disaster, she insisted that Mademoiselle should take the veil; a cruelty which dislodged all traces of affection from the heart of the Queen of Navarre towards her mother, whom she now regarded with ill-concealed anger and aversion. Hence her reconcilement with Navarre—her abetting his escape—and her determination to forsake the court.

The subsequent events we have either fully detailed in the course of our history, or thrown sufficient light upon their progress to make the narrative intelligible.

"And how could one so gentle as yourself," exclaimed the enraptured De Nevailles; "dwell beneath the angry frowns of the mistress of the Louvre?"

"I scarcely know," replied Emilie, "but her Majesty carried her violent resolves under a mask of smoothness. Sometimes she relented, and laughingly called me, a little Valois 'that ought never to have seen the light. And even when angry, she would speak calmly. Before I quitted the Louvre to travel to the convent at Avignon,

she said to me—"You have no right to a place in this world, Mademoiselle Emilie, and must not complain of its inhabitants that you are treated unceremoniously. We who hold the privilege to exist here, have a career to run—a long uneven course with a distant goal. Our destinies, Mademoiselle, are as conflictive as the contest of charioteers outvying and shooting beyond each other in the race. You, Emilie, are a stranger, and on foot, and must run the risk of being trampled on as an unavoidable impediment thrown in our path."

"If her Majesty lives long enough to welcome us to the court," exclaimed the Baron, pressing her hand to his lips; "you may say that though a stranger and on foot, a wayward charioteer who contended for the race more from the free exercise of his energies than desire of reaching the goal, stopped in the midst of the struggle to pick up a precious gem which lay in his path; and in the possession of which, he deems himself the most fortunate of the competitors."

We must quit this interview, so interesting to the lovers, to describe the enthusiasm with which Monsieur Pomini received the letters-patent from the hands of De Nevailles, creating him the Seigneur of L'Isle du Marais. As he surveyed the blazonry which the facile invention of Montjoie

had created for the man of letters-patent, he cried out in a voice of childish delight——

"I am now an equal of the Marquis—my career is ended!"

"If you are indeed, a gentleman, Monsieur L'Isle du Marais," said De Nevailles, "you will feel it has but just commenced. Montjoie has charged that field of azure with anticipated deeds, yet to be realized by your skill and conduct."

L'Isle du Marais bowed profoundly; but it was as much to honour the appellation which he heard for the first time applied to himself, as to show his acquiescence in the sentiment expressed by the Baron.

But in the midst of the happiness which reigned at D'Usson, the mournful intelligence arrived of the death of the Queen-mother. The mighty soul of Catherine De Medicis had forsook its earthly tenement; and left that world, whose children she delighted to struggle with, where power and dominion were the prizes of the conqueror.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,
Our stern alarums chang'd to merry meetings,
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
SHAKSPEARE.

WHILST Henry, the second of that name, and the consort of Catherine, was alive and in good health, it had been foretold to her Majesty that all her sons would become kings. To this prediction, she did not at the time attach much credit; but when Francis the Second died, scarcely at an age of maturity—and his brother Charles the Ninth succeeded to the throne, she became apprehensive lest the prophecy should be realized in its direst form. Her fears pointed to the successive occupation of the crown of France by her offspring—although the prediction had been uttered in general terms, and did not specify the titles of her children's future greatness. The course which

she pursued, although in accordance with the ordinary feelings of the human race, was scarcely worthy of so clear-sighted a Princess.

Stimulated into a belief of the prediction by the death of her eldest son, she strove to elude its import in respect to the younger princes of the house of Valois. She could not see, or rather would not see, that if she put faith in the prophecy, it were useless to contend against it; yet her conduct evinced a belief of the power of the prophecy, whilst all her endeavours were strained to prevent its accomplishment.

To this end, she succeeded in placing Henry on the elective throne of Poland; and D'Alençon was subsequently dispatched to pay court to the Queen of England; hoping by these means that the letter of the prediction might be fulfilled without the dreadful alternative of seeing her sons succeed each other on the throne of their ancestors.

But Charles died—D'Alençon died—and the last of the house of Valois, whose life had been attempted previously at the porch of Notre Dame, now fell a sacrifice to the vengeance of the monks, through their rage at the murder of the Protector.

Valois had declared to the assembled army of Catholics and Huguenots besieging Paris, that

they should enter by a passage through its rebellious walls; but he was not aware that at the moment he was giving utterance to this vindictive speech, the Leaguers had sped an arrow at his heart.

Jaques Clement, the enthusiast, whose wild fancies were kept in incessant play by his brethren, was again let loose like a blood-hound, to track the steps of his royal prey. He left the besieged city with letters entrusted to him by a gentleman attached to Valois, and who had been purposely deceived in the character of the enthusiast, through the adroitness of the Leaguers. With these credentials, he gained access to the King of France at the camp at St. Cloud; and while the monarch was perusing the papers, he was mortally wounded by the treacherous monk, whose mangled body, dispersed to all the winds of heaven, could but ill atone to the officers of Valois for the loss they had sustained.

Ere he died, the King named Henry of Navarre as his successor, who also claimed the crown as the eldest of the Princes of the blood, as the Bourbon branch were designated.

But the Catholic lords would not recognise the heretic Navarre as their sovereign; and they prepared to leave the camp, and forsake the siege.

To prevent this step, which would have been the ruin of his own forces as well as his long cherished hopes, he supplicated them to reconsider their decision, and to survey the position in which they themselves would be placed, if De Mayenne, who openly aspired to the crown, were triumphant, assisted as he had been by the money and ammunition of Spain.

To this remonstrance, the nobles replied by an offer of their allegiance if the Prince would enter the pale of the Catholic church. Navarre rejoined, that such a proceeding was immediately impossible; and that so sudden a conversion would be deservedly held as faithless and deceptive; but if they would continue the siege, he would apply himself devoutly to study the tenets of their religion. This offer was accepted—it gave breathing time to the monarch—and he left his future conduct to chance or expediency, determined to be guided by his own friends in the matter of conversion.

As the spring advanced, the chance of capturing the city became more and more certain; a famine, dreadful in its effects to the poorer classes, and distressing to the richer inhabitants, was the daily portion of the besieged. Yet De Mayenne had a stout heart and resolute troops; and the voices of

the preachers grew louder as their bodies became weaker. Montpensier, who fed on revenge, was in the city, and encouraged the Leaguers to withstand the evils which assailed them. Nicholas Poulain, whose vocation was still kept secret, (a test of his wonderful ability), after the death of his royal mistress, and subsequently of her son, continued to render the same good offices to Henri Quatre, as he had performed towards the house of Valois, by sending information to the camp of the movements of the besiegers.

The lieutenant, however, was obliged to exert himself in the service of the League, and to appear the most zealous of its partisans. One morning Bussi Le Clerc, the polite governor of the Bastille, summoned Nicholas to accompany him to the palace of the Parliament.

"I have received orders," said Le Clerc, "to invite the Presidents and the whole court to dine with me at the Bastille to-day—and you must assist me in marshalling the squadron, as our venerable friends may be predisposed to escape."

Upon the breaking up of the States at Blois, the members of the court of Parliament—a chamber of executive justice, totally dissimilar to what is understood in England by the word Parliament—returned to Paris, and continued their sittings in

spite of the war of the League, and even of the siege of the city. But these worthies had offended De Mayenne, and were consequently doomed to suffer for their treason to the holy Union of the Catholics.

Le Clerc, accompanied by Poulain and several halberdiers, entered the chamber where the Parliament was sitting, and requested the members of the court to accompany him home to his palace. But the venerable President, De Harlai, reproached him for his rudeness in interrupting the court, and bade him wait till the sitting was concluded.

"Rude!" cried the enraged Le Clerc;—"if La Chapelle had done this office, you might have thought him rude—but I!—By St. Genevieve! I will be rude."

The revenge which Bussi Le Clerc meditated for the attack on his courtesy, was certainly more refined than might have been expected from a citizen-leaguer. He forced the court to give up its sitting, and to follow his directions implicitly under threats of an inconvenient chamber in the Bastille.

The populace were seemingly well-disposed to taunt and reproach the venerable and learned corps, who marched through the streets in their chamber-costume, headed by Le Clerc, and fol-

lowed by Nicholas and a pair of halberdiers. But the governor of the Bastille designed a far different punishment than the pelting of a mob. Lincestre had chosen that morning to deliver a discourse to the citizens on the performance of the duties which the League expected of them; and to the crowded hall, where the preacher sat in his professor's chair of St. Bartholemew, Le Clerc led the bewildered court of Parliament, in order to give them, as he informed Nicholas, an appetite for their dinner.

Lincestre, who witnessed the entry of Le Clerc and his learned train, glad of the unexpected presence of his victims, signified to the governor that he should conduct his friends to a convenient spot beneath the chair.

The discourse embraced an eulogy upon the late Protector, and an anathema against his enemies, threatening such as were alive with the penalties of hell, and adjudging those dead, to be already there. He informed his congregation that Henry of Valois was at that moment in purgatory tied to a stake, and surrounded by a girdle of Jews and sorcerers instead of faggots, and whose bodies burnt like pitch.

"Let us keep him there!" thundered out the preacher;—"pray to the saints that he may not

escape, lest the intercession and prayers of ignorant and misguided men effect his release. Pray! take oath that you will pray—and hold up your hands as a signal. Ah! my Lord President," continued he looking fiercely at De Harlai, who was ashamed to be seen in such company, and exposed to such insults, "your eyes are cast on the floor, and your hands are by your side. Up with them!—higher, by the holy God of vengeance—higher still! that all the people may see them, my Lord President."

The poor President was forced to hold up his hands in concert with the excited congregation, maddened with the vehemence of the preacher.

He then animadverted on the principal personages of France, both friends and enemies to the League. Of the late Queen Catherine, he said, "She was once a good saint, and I do not much care if you should have leisure to say an *Ave* or a *Pater* for her—this I leave to your own inclination." But he suddenly started, and cried out in a loud voice that fell upon his audience like a blast of lightning—

"Swear again—I have another oath!"

"Swear that you will spend the last denier in your purse to prevent this holy city falling into

the hands of the Atheist Navarre! Swear that you will defend the city to the last extremity."

The half-famished congregation, whose blood already fevered with incipient disease, and now inflamed by the harangue of the preacher, shouted like madmen. He was elevated in his chair on the shoulders of the most robust of the congregation, and carried into the street, the insensate flock singing and dancing around their idol.

"Paris is Jerusalem!" shouted the wild dancers, "and its people are starving! but plenty will soon be with us—and the streets shall flow with milk and honey."

Onward drove the mad cabal surrounding their stern preacher, and increasing each moment by the accession of men, women and children, as furious as themselves—for the disease was contagious. By houses where lay the bodies of those who had died of famine—over the corse of many a poor wretch who had breathed his last in the open causeway—passed this grotesque tumultuary procession; while its throned influential power sat like a demi-god, calm and unmoved by the whirl and hurrying eddies which bore him along.

Behind, in sad contrast to the exhilarated dancers,

walked the gentleman of the long robe, like a train of gloomy penitents.

It chanced that the Duke De Mayenne and his officers were crossing the city to inspect the opposite suburb of Montmartre, which had suffered from an attack of the besiegers, who were only repulsed with great difficulty.

When the crowd saw the Duke approaching, they set up a loud cheer for their resolute chief; and opened a passage for him to pass through their dense body. The enthusiasts who carried the preacher—without any signal from their haughty burthen, bore him close to the horse of the Catholic commander, who guessing at the humour of the populace, saluted his austere friend with the greatest respect.

De Mayenne was very far behind his illustrious kinsman the late Protector in personal appearance; on the contrary, the defects of his person were proverbial. A short thick body, best concealed beneath his black armour, and from which colour he acquired the epithet of the dark Mayenne; a rough shaggy beard, and an enormous hand, designated both by friends and foes, *un gigot*, were the characteristics which would have betrayed the lieutenant-general of the League,

the chief of the Holy Union, and the aspirant to the sceptre of Valois, in any province of France.

The Duke stretched forth a hand to his sanctified friend—it seemed to grow larger, the nearer it approached the priest, who put his own into it;—a signal for the multitude to shout with a vehemence which shook the very houses.

Poulain, who was bringing up the rear of the gentlemen of the long robe, heard a whispering among them; and being anxious to ascertain the subject of the colloquy, for he apprehended that one or more of the younger members intended to escape, an event which would have brought him into trouble with his courteous principal, the governor of the Bastille, approached as near as he could without betraying his suspicion of their intent.

"Ah! Monsieur De Thou!" said one of the gentlemen, "see how the rough Leaguer courts the monk; Father Lincestre is a happy man in his glory."

"Happy;—yes!" exclaimed the one spoken to, a grave-looking president, and whose features did not in the least relax as he uttered his joke, "I had no faith in him before—but I plainly perceive he is a greater man than Moses—he has only to

stretch forth his hand, and he gets into the land of fatness immediately."

"Umph!" murmured Nicholas;—"do these gentlemen know where they are to dine to-day?"

"It was worse than folly for De Harlai to oblige us to assemble when the rabble of the city were so excited," rejoined the first speaker;—"I wish I were safe out of Paris—but I verily believe our president would hold his court in the midst of an earthquake."

"I can fancy him in such a case," replied De Thou, suffering a transient smile,—within the limits of decorum of a president,—to cross his features, "the ground sinking all around him—and a gentleman's head disappearing just as he had asked leave of the president to bring up a cause from the inferior court—and De Harlai, calm and unmoved, replying, as he stretched out his neck to have a glance at the vanishing head,—Monsieur your proceeding is irregular."

"Well!" muttered Poulain, "these gentry of the robe are in some measure like myself—they look on danger coolly—and have a sly moment for a joke! I should like to be a President of Parliament if the season were quieter. A man's ruin or his advancement may be spoken of without offence."

"How unlucky," continued the lieutenant, aloud, "this rencontre!"

"And why?" asked De Thou, surveying the vacant face of Nicholas.

"Because, Monseigneur," replied the latter, without moving a muscle, "the drum has, ere this time, beat the dinner-hour—the chambers at the Bástille are opening a wide mouth for their expected guests—and my poor comrades, Jean and François, whom Monsieur Bussi ordered to be in waiting for his return—must be fatigued to death with their iron-load, which the rascal Jean calls steel-sausages *à la Bussi!*"

"Unfeeling wretch!" exclaimed De Thou.

"It is very true," said Nicholas, moving back to his former station, beside the halberdiers;—"the very words I might have used if this same gentleman had told me with his gravity, that my land belonged to another."

"My good comrade, Nicholas," cried Le Clerc, pushing up to the lieutenant, "we are hemmed in on every side! Have a quick eye, while my fellows open a passage through the crowd."

Bussi Le Clerc thereupon shouted to the people to make way for Messieurs the Presidents and Members of the Parliament; and as the halberdiers seconded this appeal by lowering their wea-

pons, the multitude opened an avenue for the train, and it passed onward, amid the groans and curses of the people heaped on the heads of the unfortunate guests of the governor.

But evils never come alone. Le Clerc and his goodly company were very soon impeded in their progress by a crowd assembled round a church door. A troop of monks, preceded by others bearing wax-tapers, were carrying a figure of wax moulded into the effigies of the murdered Henry of Valois. These entered the church, just as Le Clerc approached the spot; and a little fat monk trailing an arquebuse was about to follow— but happening to catch a glimpe of the approaching procession, he stopped short, and the governor recognised the little Feuïllant, Father Bernard. The sight of the prisoners in their robes affected the monk almost to ecstacy, and he shouted out, while pointing to the wax-figure——

"*Au diable! Au diable! Au diable!* Behold your master! See his foul body in purgatory! Lead them into the Church! *alarme! alarme!* Ah! Ah!"

Le Clerc obeyed the summons. The scene within the church was in keeping with the mad priest-ridden spirit of the Parisians; we would fain pass over the frightful disgusting spectacle.

Briefly:—the wax-figure was brought to the altar—a large spit run through it lengthways—and in this fashion, it was suspended above the many lighted tapers on the altar, which soon caused the wax to melt. When it began to dissolve away, Father Bernard cried——

"Aha! See! By this token Henry, the atheist, is roasting in purgatory! 'Tis not enough! Make him confess, good people!"

And the corps of monks giving way to allow the multitude to approach, they began pricking and piercing the figure—the women with bodkins—and the men with lance-heads, pikes, and with the points of their swords. *Le diable Boiteux*, at every thrust, shouting out a terrific cry, which echoed through the vaulted aisles of the church.

From this scene, which was much too coarse for his taste, Le Clerc retreated with his prisoners; but when they emerged into the street, M. De Thou was missing. The governor was in a fury—the church door was immediately shut, and an active search commenced, but Monseigneur could not be found. Bussi could not help suspecting Poulain, against whom there had been gradually gathering a storm in the breasts of the Council of Sixteen, occasioned by the disclosure of many important proceedings of the League, which must have been

divulged to the enemy by one intimately in their confidence, if not a member of their own Council. Henry of Navarre had, in fact, acted on the secret intelligence transmitted to him, with much less circumspection than characterized the proceedings of her late Majesty; and, in consequence, the suspicions of the Sixteen were roused to the utmost.

This being the case, a rigid but secret examination of their own members followed—but none were convicted—and at length suspicion rested on their active servant, Nicholas Poulain.

The escape of De Thou while under the joint care of the lieutenant, determined Bussi to place him under the same *surveillance* as the prisoner who had fled. Nicholas remonstrated calmly, but the governor declared that suspicion would attach to himself if he did not confine him till an inquiry had been instituted by the Council. Faith in his fidelity being at so low an ebb, Poulain saw at one glance that his game was over—but there was now need of all his imperturbability, as he found himself suddenly within the toils of the municipal inquisition.

Affecting readiness to obey the order of the governor, he walked behind the vanguard of the halberdiers quietly till he was near the end of the

Rue St. Antoine, and Le Clerc not wishing to display to the passengers the most confidential officer of the Council under arrest, had not taken the precaution, as he ought to have done, of placing the prisoner between two of the guard. This was just as Nicholas desired;—it was indeed his forlorn-hope; and it served him at need. He watched the opportunity, and rushed off from the solemn train, as they walked leisurely down the middle of the street. The lanes behind the *Rue St. Antoine* were familiar in all their turnings to his practised eye; through these he ran with the speed of a man flying for life; the inhabitants calling after him to know whom he was giving chace to—as they had seen no one in advance. Every one knew Poulain exceedingly well; and taking advantage of this circumstance, he cried out in his hurrying course, that the President De Thou had escaped from his hands on the way to the Bastille, and had fled down the back streets. Many of the Leaguers joined in the search, as De Thou was an object of their hatred; and the streets were covered with the voluntary *poursuivants.* The appearance of the halberdiers in the distance confirmed the relation of the lieutenant, who ran the fastest of any, and outstripped his coadjutors, who stopped in the streets, having no

particular goal in view, and expecting that the President might suddenly appear, perhaps, in the contrary direction to the flight of Nicholas.

As he approached the *Porte St. Antoine*, he beheld the officer on guard at the gate.

"I am safe," said the lieutenant to himself, "if they give me another half-minute."

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur Poulain!" said the officer, "what news? Have the heretics made another attack on Montmartre?"

"No!" cried Nicholas; "but De Thou has escaped! I must pass the gate to request the Chevalier to send his patroles through the suburbs!"

The Chevalier to whom Poulain alluded, was D'Aumale, who had the command of the soldiers of the League guarding the embankments and batteries raised for the protection of the suburb St. Antoine.

The gate closed upon the retreat of the breathless lieutenant, who with some little difficulty, escaped across the fields beyond the embankments, and was taken prisoner by a picquet of Huguenots, and carried, in obedience to his earnest request, backed by a purse of gold, to the headquarters of Henri Quatre, by whom he was received with the greatest kindness.

The President De Thou had escaped without the assistance of Poulain, between whom and Monseigneur, the feeling was the reverse of friendly; a client who had seen him in the church contrived to dislodge him from the company of his colleagues, and stripping the robes from his back, he reached the outside of the edifice in safety, and sought shelter in the house of a friend, wherein he remained concealed.

But the siege was drawing to a close. The Prince of Parma, who had assembled a large army in the Low Countries to assist the League, died suddenly; and his officers refused to march into France, as the Hollanders were much disaffected with the Spanish sway, and the Prince, whose military talents had awed them into subjection, being removed from the scene, it was conjectured that the Spanish forces would have work enough in their own governments without seeking employment for their arms in France.

Meanwhile, the horrors of the famine increased in the city. And Henry of Navarre, who was earnestly bent on the capture of the place, no longer needing the spur of De Rosny or De Nevailles, so effectually cut off the supplies, that the Parisians were now deprived of the occasional aid of rations which came at night in boats from

the towns on the Seine both above and below the city.

The King's party had been equally successful in other provinces of the kingdom; and prevented the Leaguers from hastening to the assistance of their leader, whose principal reliance having been placed on the co-operation of the Prince of Parma, he had suffered himself to be shut up, believing that the city would soon be relieved by the arrival of the Spaniards. This hope proved fallacious; and no aid arriving from the south or the western provinces, he was reduced, by the want of food, to the alternative of capitulating or cutting a passage through the enemy, and leaving the city to its fate. But as the latter course would have deprived his good friends of making advantageous terms with the King, at the same time that it would have ensured their subjection through the absence of the garrison, he adopted the latter policy.

He had scarcely made up his mind to this course, when a judicious and well-planned attack on every side put all the suburbs in possession of the chivalric Bourbon Prince; and De Mayenne delaying no longer, sent a message to the enemy's camp that very evening. A conference ensued, and the terms of the capitulation agreed

on; they were extremely favourable to the Leaguers; but Henry declared that as he one day hoped to see every Frenchman acknowledge him as monarch, he would endeavour to gain the good-will of his present enemies by moderation and clemency.

To save the honour of the Duke de Mayenne, he was allowed to march out of the city with his garrison, ere the articles were signed; leaving the Count de Brissac, governor, to capitulate, and affix his name to the conditions. The Count, being very much in debt, had stipulated for the payment of four hundred thousand crowns to himself to pay off the claims of creditors, and to put his affairs in order. This was acceded to—the signatures affixed to the capitulation paper—and the two gates of the *Porte St. Honoré* and the *Porte St. Denis*, put in possession of the royalists.

Ere day-break various detachments had marched into Paris to make all sure; and when the sun shone out with the splendour of mid-day, the head of the house of Bourbon, harnessed in the armour which had withstood the heavy blows of his enemies at Coutras, and surrounded by his gallant soldiers, Catholic and Huguenot, entered the city, and rode direct to the palace of the Louvre. Since he had quitted its spacious halls, a noble dynasty had been swept to the dust; and

despite the joy which beamed on the features of his brave comrades, and the completion of his own high destiny, his face was charged with an expression of regret and sorrow for which his officers could not account. But memory reverted to his parting with D'Alençon, and the untoward fate of that eccentric Prince; every saloon and well remembered hall was associated with objects of pleasure or of pleasing regret; and it was not till after many days' residence at a palace which he could scarcely bring his mind to believe to be his own, that he regained his wonted equanimity, and had leisure to survey the pinnacle of power to which he attained.

The power of the League was extinguished by the surrender of the capital to the sway of the gallant monarch; Rouen, and other cities, capitulated in a similar manner;—that is to say, Henry did not object to pay various sums of money to the nobles of the League, who had almost ruined themselves in its cause; and by which peaceful means he shortened the duration of the contest, and restored internal peace to the kingdom of France.

This fine country having passed through its ordeal of civil wars became firmly united under the rule of the house of Bourbon. The nobles, being

no longer under the necessity of living beneath walls of iron, threw aside their cumbersome armour for the light garb of peace;—exchanging the creaking of rusty hinges and jointed vambraces for the rustling of silk and velvet: the half barbarous gentleman of the sixteenth century became a worshipper of the polite theories of the Count De Quelus, who, in matters of personal economy, was far beyond his age.

The merchant, the agriculturist, and the poorer classes of the kingdom, felt the change from war to peace, still more beneficially; and their progressive and unwearied labours, under the care of a wise Prince, ensured a rapid prosperity to themselves and their country.

An honest country gentleman, whose house stood on the apex of a hill commanding a panoramic view of varied beauty, wishing to have the whole scene transferred to canvas, engaged a landscape painter to perform the task, and while incidentally describing the nature and extent of the prospect, said—"you must first draw your circle!" Neither the painter nor ourselves, to whom the anecdote was related, could understand otherwise, than that the artist was to describe a circle on his canvas, placing the hill and superincumbent mansion in the centre;—

the point of view which greeted the Squire every morning, and which he no doubt expected to see faithfully illustrated on the painter's canvas.

We hope that we have described our own "circle" to the satisfaction of our reader;—not, indeed, by presenting to him the whole arena at one view, but by carrying him with us around the course, from the Louvre, our starting post, back to the same ancient palace, our goal.

But being apprehensive, that some very inquisitive friends may attempt to pick a quarrel with us for letting fall the curtain upon the *dramatis personæ*, as they stand grouped around the heroic Henry—without even a hint of their future welfare or unhappiness, we will introduce the characters severally as they retire from the stage, quite unconscious of being made the object of further speculation. The ladies shall have the preference.

Catherine—but we forget, alas! that she was no more; yet Margaret still lived and flourished, not as Queen of France, for her and Henry were as magnetic poles of the same bearing—flying apart whenever accidentally brought into contact. She was divorced with the consent of his Holiness, and lived sometimes at D'Usson, and sometimes at her magnificent hotel in Paris, the patroness of literature, especially of literary ecclesiastics and

monks—and the foundress of more than one convent. She died the last scion of the house of Valois!

The Duchess of Montpensier perceiving that the cause of the League was for ever lost, buried her violent political tendencies, and employed herself in the education of her brother's children. The Princess of Condé, related through her late husband to the house of Bourbon, remained a favourite at the Louvre,—but Henry was not rich enough, or rather disbursed his money in ways better calculated to improve the impoverished country, than placing it at the command of the lady of the revels.

With the death of her royal mistress vanished the political influence of the Duchess D'Usez, but her wit and beauty remained to enliven the circle in which she had shone so brilliantly. The Countess Candales, who had bestowed herself and fortunes on the handsome D'Espernon, continued by her gentle coquetry to excite uneasiness in the mind of her husband, but it is not recorded that she ever again condescended to watch the motions of princes in their nocturnal promenades.

But the reader may be inquiring after Gabrielle! If he have ever seen the name of the Duchess De Beaufort in the annals of the reign of Henri

Quatre, he will have read the title bestowed on her by her royal lover preparatory to honours still more illustrious,—delayed, in the first instance, by the intrigues of the monarch's councillors, and finally anticipated by—we must write it, though we would fain let flourish in the imagination of our reader, so fair a flower—by death.

Emilie! We said but just now that Margaret died the last of the house of Valois—yet Emilie survived her mother—worthy of the stock from whence she sprang, though unhonoured, unrecorded by public history through the pride and policy of the Queen-mother—dispossessed also of her father's seigniory through the impediments which hindered the establishment of her parentage, and which attempting to remove, would, in case of failure, have affixed a stain on her surviving parent. A cruel fate! but for which Margaret made amends out of the lands appropriated to her Majesty on her divorce from France and Navarre.

Whether Lisette deserve mention we know not, but we can find scarcely any trace of her future history, save that she continued in the family of the Baroness De Nevailles. We did expect,—judging from what we heard of the girl, and the clever lacquey, Antoine, that by searching the registers and records open to our inspection,—to

have found evidence of their marriage, being so well disposed towards each other. Our inquiry was fruitless, and we can only hope that such a union did occur. But to the other sex!

D'Espernon lived to an extreme old age, and mindful of the favour enjoyed at court in his youth and manhood, asserted a right to drive into the inner-court of the Louvre, deemed the privilege only of royalty. But the favourite of Valois carried his point against Louis De Bourbon.

The Marshal De Biron was created a Duke for his services by Henry; but though repaid so amply by the gratitude and generosity of the monarch, he could not forget the dynasty which flourished in his youth. Candales lost her attractions; and the shades of Catherine and Valois haunted his memory, and made him, at times, a jealous and factious subject of the Bourbon monarch. We must not omit to record, that he composed a Greek elegy on the death of his late sovereign.

De Rosny became De Sully with a ducal title; and no man ever earned his honours and his wealth more deservingly. The finances of the kingdom, as might be expected, were in a wretched condition when Henri Quatre ascended the throne; but the prudence, the tact, and we might say,

the furious and determined warfare, which Sully maintained against the peculant collectors and intendants of taxes and imposts, rendered his sovereign a service above all price—and himself worthy the imitation of future ministers.

De Grammont held a rank of importance in the French armies; but was of little service as an adviser of his liege. The Marquis De Cœuvres was honoured with the insignia of the three orders of the King, as a recompense for the loss of D'Usson; the governorship of a military post was offered him, but his age caused him to decline the command. The Viscount De Turenne, as we have already intimated, married the sister and heiress of the Duke De Bouillon, which title and sovereign principality became his own, and enabled him, when it suited his pride, to retire to the strong town of Sedan, and set his sovereign at defiance.

The Count De Quelus continued a model of graceful carriage, and elegance of costume, till, unfortunately, he fell in a duel. His monument was honoured by an epitaph, a portion of which appears at the head of one of the chapters in the present volume. Monsieur De Villeroi was too well instructed in affairs of state to be neglected by the new dystany; he remained in office till

he was too old to display courage in the chace, and sought amusement in the composition of memoirs, illustrative of his own era,—and in which he laboured hard to prove his fidelity to Valois.

The Duke De Mayenne tendered his allegiance to Henry, and disbanded his forces—striving to forget, in the arts of peace, his ambitious and fruitless designs, which, indeed, at one time (so deep was the feeling against Valois for the assassination of Guise), were deemed not impracticable. D'Aumale became a pupil of the Count De Quelus: the once formidable Lincestre sank into obscurity—his *rôle* was played: the treacherous Bussi Le Clerc, for whose defection we were grieved, as the man was not destitute of generous qualities, fled to Brussels in apprehension of danger, and continued to reside there till the day of his death; and disdained not, far away from the scene of his glory, to resort to his old profession of *maître d'armes.*

Nicholas Poulain was made chief officer of the police; subsequently deputy-governor of the Bastille; and was, besides, oft employed in the delicate task of watching the proceedings of foreign envoys, in which he acquitted himself to perfection.

Roquelaure, as his Holiness predicted, never reached an elevated station in the monastic or

ecclesiastic hierarchy; but he retained the office of confessor to the Queen of Navarre, and it is strongly surmised that her Majesty's hotel had more attraction in his eyes than the richest abbey, or post of secretary to cardinal or pope.

As an appurtenance of royalty, Chicot became the servant of the fourth Henry; but like De Biron, his sympathies were retrospective, the new dynasty, in his imagination, wore a forlorn, cheerless aspect; his heart was with the lost Valois, and despite the friendship of the Baron De Nevailles, he drooped inwardly. It was remarked that he was fond of visiting the residence of the Queen of Navarre, for which no other cause could be assigned than her relationship to his late master. Whether he would have recovered from this melancholy we cannot say, as he was cut off prematurely by violence, and by a knightly hand; a rare honour mayhap, to one of his class, and purchased cheaply with the loss of life. He died rich, and left De Nevailles his heir.

Jean François Pomini, Sieur L'Isle du Marais, lived to a good old age, and was succeeded by his son of the same name. The family continued to flourish till the waters of the Revolution, more destructive than the rapid Rhone, over-flooded the seigniory and its possessors; whether since the

subsidence of the moral deluge, the old land-marks remain unimpaired, or whether the Pominis of L'Isle du Marais were merged in the class from whence they sprang, it is impossible for us to say, as *la jeune France* is a region as yet unknown to us.

Ezzelin and his friend Schwartz recrossed the Rhine much richer than at their entry into the scene of warfare and plunder; indeed, the return of Turenne's regiment, after the siege of Paris, at which it was present, to Germany, caused a strong sensation among the needy adventurers of that nation, who deeply regretted the termination of hostilities which deprived them of all chance of rivalling the good fortune of the Viscount's Ritters.

The same uncertainty which hangs over the fortunes of Lisette, shrouds the career of Antoine; we know only that he continued in the service of his master.

The after-career of the Baron himself can be traced with much certainty and minuteness. From letters in his own hand, and from others written by friends of the Baron, we learn that his domestic happiness was complete; that his sovereign heaped honours on his favourite councillor; and that with the riches accruing from resources already hinted, the Chateau de Nevailles became the nucleus of a

hamlet of considerable extent. But how sped the public career of our ardent diplomatist? If the truth must be told,—with less glory than he coveted—and the cause may be traced to his eccentricity of conduct and grotesque humour. His ambition desired the post of secretary of state, that he might exercise a permanent influence in guiding the destinies of his country, and if his Majesty's pleasure had been the only obstacle to this step, it would have been readily yielded to the favourite's desire; but the king's other advisers were unanimous against his elevation; and Henry, whose cabinet was composed of members of both religions, and who perceived that the embers of civil strife were not completely extinguished, was unwilling to embroil himself with his ministers; and in consequence contented himself, for the present, by bestowing on the Baron the insignia of the three orders of his Majesty, a captaincy in the royal guard, and a government in Navarre. But although the eccentricity and humour of De Nevailles had made him an object of dread to the cabinet, yet on many occasions his services were indispensable. When a difficulty occurred with a foreign court through the obstinacy or caprice of its sovereign or minister, or as it happened, the untoward influence of a royal mistress,

the advisers of his most Christian Majesty, united in crying, "We must send De Nevailles." His missions were, indeed, eminently successful; though after a severe scrutiny of the temperament and conduct of the Baron, we are forced to sympathize with the prudential fears of Henry's council.

The *bonhommie*, good sense, and tact of the fourth Henry, speedily rendered him a popular monarch; he was endowed with a rare faculty— that of listening to, and adopting the policy of his wisest councillors. This conduct in a great degree contributed to the successes which won him the title of Henry the Great. And, although on a narrow view, it might be urged that the triumphs, both civil and warlike, for which he was famed, were due to his councillors, it must be borne in mind, that for a Prince of active faculties, clear perception, enthusiastic temperament, and military skill of the highest character, to submit in every instance to the advice and remonstrances of abler heads, was in itself a proof of genius; an evidence of humility of heart, and of a self-conviction, that the will of a good monarch must bend to the wisdom of faithful advisers.

The conversion of Henry to the Catholic faith, and his consequent submission to the discipline of the church of Rome, may appear to the student of

history, to need extenuation or apology. But we do not hold this most important step to have been a criminal dereliction of religious duty; and we have never attempted to elevate the *man* for the sake of creating a hero of romance. We trust that the aim of literature or of moral and political science is better supported by depicting and contrasting the good and evil which appertain to historic personages, than by concealing weaknesses, and heightening virtuous characteristics to the standard of ideal or romantic perfection.

Henry had no alternative but to seek refuge within the pale of the olden faith, or resign the crown. This is the plain unvarnished truth:—Catholic France, in the sixteenth century, refused to obey a Calvinistic monarch. And what would have been the result if Henry, through conscientious scruples, had resigned his birthright (retain it he could not as a Huguenot), and retired to the little kingdom of Navarre, rather than adopt the religious discipline of the majority of his subjects? The race of Valois was extinguished. France would have been annexed to Spain under the sway of the Duke De Mayenne, as viceroy; or if Philip had foregone his claim by marriage with a daughter of France, the brother of the late Protector might have been a nominal

king. In any wise, Spanish gold and Spanish arms would have converted the kingdom into a province of Spain, without power, however, of crushing the Huguenots in their strong-holds. Hence would have resulted a most destructive intestine war without prospect of termination.

This threatened disaster was obviated by the conversion of Navarre. The Catholic nobles who had kept aloof, became submissive and loyal subjects; Spain and her allies withdrew their pretensions; and Henry reigned over a united kingdom.

That he did not, however, desert the Huguenots, we have sufficient proof, not only in his edicts of religious toleration, but in the creed of his ministers and the governors of provinces, many of whom were of the reformed faith;—the Duke De Sully among the most illustrious.

The entry of the Bourbon Prince into Paris, marks the boundaries of two important epochs in modern history. It consolidated the power of the monarchy, strengthened the kingdom by the acquisition of Navarre, with its mighty barrier of mountains. The stream of French history flowed on in a regular uninterrupted channel; civilization, with its literary fruits, followed in the train of domestic peace; whilst the warlike energies of the

nation were directed against foreign enemies and aggressors.

To the imagination, the entry of Navarre into his capital, presents a picture causing mingled pleasure and regret. The long array of chivalry displays the last pageant of romance; the martial trophies of the feudal era, the burnished harness of Milan proof, and with these, the valour and courtesy of the olden time, are about to fade away, and live only in the memory of poets and chroniclers.

We see the apotheosis of chivalry; we behold the gallant train of soldiers, whose names have been familiar in Europe from the era of Charlemagne, crowding the streets of Paris, as of yore, when a royal tournament or congress of arms had assembled the flower of the nation. The houses are graced with the presence of the fair dames who "rain influence and judge the prize;" the air is rent with the cries of delighted subjects;—the hero of Coutras is before the Louvre;—and chivalry is extinct with the chivalric career of her last hero.

THE END.

Gilbert & Rivington, Printers, St. John's Square, London.